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CELTIC STORIES

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BY

EDWARD THOMAS

AUTHOR OF 'THE SOUTH COUNTRY,' 'REST AND UNREST,'
'LIGHT AND TWILIGHT,' 'LIFE OF RICHARD JEFFERIES,'
'MAURICE MAETERLINCK,' ETC.

160436.
1.4.21.

OXFORD
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS
LONDON EDINBURGH GLASGOW NEW YORK
TORONTO MELBOURNE CAPE TOWN BOMBAY
HUMPHREY MILFORD
1918

PB
1100
T45

ON THE PRONUNCIATION OF WELSH NAMES

Accent the first syllable of words of two syllables, thus: Mábon.

Accent the second syllable of words of three syllables, thus: Mathólwch.

Accent the third syllable of words of four syllables, thus: Uspathádden.

WELSH		ENGLISH
c	=	k (hence Pencawr is here spelt Penkower).
f	=	v (hence Redýnfre is here spelt Redýnvre).
dd	=	th in bathe (hence 'Yspaddaden' is here spelt 'Uspathadden').
th	=	th in bath.
u and y (as in Nudd and Gwýnedd)	=	y in Flynn.
y (as in Cynthélig)	=	o in son.
e (as in Teléri)	=	e in there.
w (as in Mathólwch)	=	oo in cook.
aw (as in Íddawc)	=	ow in growl.
ae (as in Llaesgyvnéwid)	=	i in ice.
yw (as in Llyw)	=	ew in yew.
wy (as in Rhonábwy)	=	ui in bruin.

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NOTE

I OFFER my gratitude to Lady Gregory, Mrs. A. W. Hutton, Dr. P. W. Joyce and Eugene O'Curry's publishers, Messrs. Williams & Norgate, for their permission to use the following books :—

Cuchulain of Muirthemne, by Augusta Gregory. (Murray.)

The Tain, by Mary Hutton. (Maunsel & Co.)

Old Celtic Romances, by P. W. Joyce. (Longmans, Green & Co.)

Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish, by Eugene O'Curry. (Williams & Norgate.)

Dr. Joyce has allowed me to make an adaptation of his 'Fairy Palace of the Quicken Trees', which I have called 'The Palace of the Mountain Ash Trees'. 'The Land of Youth' is based chiefly on Professor O'Looney's rendering of a poem on Oisin in Tir-nan-oge ('Transactions of the Ossianic Society'). I have also had very great pleasure, and not a little help, in writing these Celtic tales, from reading Dr. Kuno Meyer's *Ancient Irish Poetry* (Constable). My debt to Lady Charlotte Guest's *Mabinogion* is as plain as it is huge. But those who read this book will not have read hers, while many if not all who have read mine will very soon afterward read hers : so that if I am an insolvent debtor at least I am no thief.

The spelling of some of the chief names in these stories has been changed so that English children may at once be able to pronounce them, as Uspathadden Penkower for Yspaddaden Pencawr. I hope this will give no trouble to bilingual Welsh children.

EDWARD THOMAS.

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THE BOYHOOD OF COHOOLIN

KING CONACHOOR of Ulster had a sister named Dectora, and one day she and the fifty maidens, her companions, vanished from the palace. No man saw their going, nor could any trace or news of them be anywhere found. At midday they were seen as they always were; before the end of the afternoon they had gone away as if on wings. Their doors were shut; their embroidery lay about, and the needles were waiting for their return. If they had been birds and the palace a cage they might have flown out of the little windows and left it empty. The black-bearded king went from room to room seeking them in vain.

Three years afterwards another misfortune befell Conachoor. A flock of birds appeared about the palace and settled down to feed on the plain of Emania. They were of a strange kind and of extraordinary beauty, and it was thought they had come from the land of youth or from some island unknown to ships. Men went out to see them and wonder at them, for they were not shy. But they ate up everything on the plain: not a grass blade escaped them. This angered Conachoor; and he and many of his chieftains yoked their chariots and went out to hunt the birds. The faster the horses ran the faster flew the birds in low flight; yet they seemed not to be afraid or to be flying from their pursuers. They called to one another in sweet voices, and as birds are happier than men so these seemed to be happier than other birds. They kept just ahead, as if the furious

panting of the horses blew them along; if the chariots stopped they stopped also.

At sunset only three birds were visible flying without haste before the tired horses. Soon even these were hid in the snow that began to fall in the darkness. The sound of the snow drowned the voices of the birds, and the men could pursue no longer. They took shelter at a hut standing all alone in the snow.

As they were sitting in the hut one of the chiefs heard a little noise of something that was not snow. So he went out and walked on towards where the sound had seemed to come from. He had not gone far when he saw a great handsome house which he entered. The lord of the house was a young warrior; his wife was a woman like a queen, attended by fifty maidens. They saluted the chief kindly and the man told him that the queenly woman was Dectora.

When the chief returned he told Conachoor about the great house, but not about Dectora and the fifty maidens.

In the morning they found in the hut a newborn boy with a face like Conachoor's. Outside there was nothing but snow upon the ground, snow falling through the air, and snow in the sky: neither the great house and its people, nor the birds, were to be seen. The baby cried and the chief who had gone out in the night spoke and told them that he had seen Dectora and her maidens and that the child was hers. So the king gave the child to another sister to nurse him. They called him Setanta, and the aged Morann prophesied concerning him. He would be a great warrior; men and bards would sing of his deeds and praise him both while he was alive and after he was dead.

The boy grew up strong and without fear. His

guardians and tutors were Amargin the warrior poet who obeyed no man but Conachoor; Fergus who made the strong afraid and the suffering cease to fear; Sencha the prudent, Blai the hospitable, and King Conachoor himself. No boy in Conachoor's warrior band of boys could ever equal him when they were playing or quarrelling together. When he was a new-comer they set upon him because he was better than them all and did not know their customs; but he beat them off and became their leader. Men used to stop and look at the boys' games, and at first they looked at one another and said: 'When we were boys we used to do better than that.' But when they had seen Setanta running or striking the ball or wrestling they did not look at one another or speak for a long time. Then one would say: 'That is pretty good'; and another: 'When I was a boy there was one who was the image of that fellow—ah! but he is gone'; and a third would say: 'I too remember one like him, but I do not know what became of him'; and then a fourth would intervene: 'You are getting old and your memory is bad. There was never any one before like that. That is Setanta.'

One day the king went to feast with Culann the smith. Culann had no lands but possessed only what he earned with his own anvil, hammer and tongs, and therefore, though his banquets were fit for two or three kings, his table was small, and very few were with Conachoor that day. He passed by the green in order to say farewell to the band of boys. There he saw Setanta at one end of the green and all the rest at the other, and he was playing against them all. 'Boy,' said the king, 'come with us to Culann's feast!'

'At this moment I cannot, O king,' said Setanta.

'Why?' asked Conachoor.

'We have not yet finished this game,' said the boy.

'But I cannot wait,' said Conachoor.

'Do not think of waiting,' replied the boy, 'I will follow.'

When they reached the smithy Setanta had not caught them up and Conachoor forgot him. They had begun to feast when the smith said:

'Before I forget, O King . . . is all your company here, or are you expecting some one else?'

'No!' said the king, 'we are all here. Why do you ask?'

'Only because my watch-dog is fierce and unaccustomed to men except the taste of the flesh of night prowlers. I will now take his chain off and let him range for the night.'

Culann, therefore, took off the chain. The hound ran a little way, made a circle round the house and returned and settled down before the entrance, with his head upon his paws and his eyes half asleep and his ears awake. The feasters were safe behind such a hound; they ate and drank as if they were in the palace and not at the crossways where the palace was a traveller's tale.

Setanta was making all speed on the king's track, cheering and hastening his journey by driving a ball before him. At sight of the boy Culann's hound gave a bark and ran towards him, thinking only of the dainty meal and already with his mouth open. But Setanta sent the ball for him to eat first. He drove it into his mouth with such force that it spoiled the hound's appetite and made him wish to get rid of even the little that he had tasted. While he was thus troubled, Setanta seized him by the hind legs and solved his difficulty by swinging him against a rock two or three times as a thrush swings a snail.

The bark of the hound wakened Conachoor's memory in the midst of the feast.

'This is an unlucky day!' he exclaimed.

'Why?' they asked.

'Because Dectora's boy, Setanta, promised to come after me, and there he is—or rather was, for he is no more than a mouthful to Culann's hound.'

The feasters rushed out to see what was happening. Fergus was the first to reach Setanta and raising him upon his shoulder bore him to Conachoor. All were glad save Culann, who followed the others back into the house and said to the king:

'It was an evil day when I asked you to that feast, O Conachoor. My dog is dead and there is none now to protect my house and flocks and herds. I shall get no sleep for thieves and at last I shall starve on this miserable plain.'

'Be not angry or alarmed, O Culann,' said Setanta. 'If any pups of the same breed are left in Ireland I will rear one to be his equal, and until he is trained I will guard your house.'

The smith was calmed.

'Good!' said Conachoor, 'very good'; and Cathbad the Druid said that henceforth Setanta should be called Cu Chulainn, Culann's hound. The name stuck to the boy and from that day he was called Cohoolin.

Some time after this, on a summer morning, Cathbad was teaching magic, and one of the students asked the master what that day was good for, as one day was good for setting out on a journey, another for building a house, another for marrying a wife. Cathbad answered that any lad who should take arms on that day for the first time would make a name above all others in Ireland: only his life would be short. Now Cohoolin was not

learning magic and was playing far away, but he heard these words. Throwing aside the club and ball and taking off his game-dress he went at once to the house where Conachoor was still sleeping.

'Hail, King!' said Cohoolin, and the king raised himself upon his elbow.

'What is it, Setanta?'

'This day I wish to take arms as a warrior.'

'Ah Cohoolin, Culann's hound, who put that into thy head?'

'Cathbad the Druid.'

'Then there is no denying the request,' said Conachoor, and he gave Cohoolin a sword, two spears and a shield, such as he kept by him to equip those of his boy band who took arms. Cohoolin received the sword and brandished it and broke it: he tried the spears against the shield and splintered the shield and then snapped the spears. Thus he did one after the other with every set of weapons in the king's store.

'O Conachoor,' he said, 'these weapons must have been meant for others.'

Then Conachoor gave him his own sword and his spears and shield. Cohoolin brandished and bent them and thrust and slashed with them upon the shield, and found them good.

'These now are good, O King,' he cried.

At that moment Cathbad entered and asked in wonder:

'Is little Cohoolin taking arms?'

'Yes . . .' said the king.

'It is not his mother's son that ought to take arms on such a day as this,' said the Druid.

'But what, did not you yourself put it into the boy's head?' asked the king.

'Certainly not!' said Cathbad.

'Brat!' said Conachoor in anger, 'then thou art a liar!'

'Be not angry, O King,' said Cohoolin, 'it was Cathbad who put this into my head, though he did not mean to do so. I was playing just now when I overheard him teaching magic, and one of his pupils asked what to-day was good for, and Cathbad answered that the lad who took arms this day would make a name above all others in Ireland, but that his life would be short. Then I came to you.'

'Yes, yes!' said Cathbad, 'it is true. Thou hast taken arms, Cohoolin, and thou shalt be famous above all men, and thou shalt run thy course very swiftly.'

'I care little,' said Cohoolin, 'if I run it in one day if the memory of it shall last.'

'Well,' said Cathbad, 'mount thy chariot, Cohoolin, the course begins.'

A chariot was brought for Cohoolin, and he drove it so as to try it. He started furiously, with whip-strokes like flints cracking in a fire. He made the chariot curve like a snake and twist suddenly like a snipe. He stopped dead, and overthrew the chariot in fragments. Many other chariots were brought, and either at the start, or in mid-career, or at the mad stopping, he destroyed them all. Turning to Conachoor he laughed, saying:

'O Conachoor, these chariots were not meant for me.'

'Jubar, son of Riangabar!' cried Conachoor, and his charioteer answered:

'I am here!'

'Yoke my chariot for Cohoolin!'

Then Cohoolin mounted the king's chariot and took the reins from the charioteer and drove in all manner of courses. No two were the same, and all were as

fantastical as the flying of a pewit in March. At last he made the horses gallop as straight as an arrow up to a stone wall, and then, having stopped them dead, lashed them over the wall itself.

'That will do very well, O Conachoor!' he said, 'this is a chariot in all ways suitable to me.'

The charioteer stepped down and said:

'That may be true, Cohoolin, but I doubt if thou art suitable to the chariot or to the horses. Come, let the horses go now into the meadows.'

'It is early yet, good Jubar. Let us away and drive round the plain of Emania.'

'Another time, perhaps; but the horses ought now to be grazing.'

'It is too early. I must go, and on my way I will see my companions.'

So Cohoolin drove to the green where the boys were playing.

'Do not go away from us, Cohoolin!' said the youngest.

'Give me a ride!' said one.

'Whose chariot is this?' asked another.

'Where are you going?' asked several.

'Thou hast taken arms to-day, Cohoolin,' said the oldest, 'O that it had been any other day!'

'But it is my day,' said Cohoolin, 'I chose it and it was chosen for me. Farewell.'

The boy band wished him triumph and safety, and though Jubar again asked him to let the horses be unharnessed he drove away.

They came at length into a broad track that could be seen running with a bold curve far away, and Cohoolin asked whither it went. 'To the Look-out Ford,' answered Jubar. At that ford every day and night stood one of the chiefs of Ulster, keeping watch and

ready to answer the challenge of any foreign champion wishing to cross. Now Conall the Victorious was at the ford and Cohoolin asked him to give up his place for the day, but he would not because Cohoolin was too young. Furthermore, when he said that he would go to Loch Echtra to find an opponent Conall offered to join him as a protector, and persisted in coming, though against Cohoolin's will. Cohoolin started first, but the other's chariot soon drew up with him. Then Cohoolin picked up a stone that was just a fistful, and hurled it with all his might at Conall's chariot yoke. Conall was thrown out, and angrily asked him:

'What is that for?'

'Oh, I was testing my aim.'

'That is it, is it? Well, bad luck to thee and thy aim, and I will not move another step to help thee whatever happens.'

'That is just as I wish.'

When they reached Loch Echtra, Jubar said:

'Turn back now, O Cohoolin, for the carving has begun in Conachoor's hall, and it will soon be too late for me to get a mouthful even by the usual scramble with the jesters and messengers of the king.'

Cohoolin answered:

'Oh, then drive on, Jubar.'

But when they came in sight of a mountain he asked its name, and what was the meaning of the white cairn upon its crest. The mountain was pleasant to his eyes that afternoon, and he bade Jubar drive that way and kept him to it in spite of his sulkiness. When they reached the cairn Cohoolin mounted it, and looking about him pointed to a peak here and a long ridge there, and here a fort and there a plain, and he asked their names and Jubar told him. Cohoolin thanked him, but suddenly

stopped him when he mentioned the fort of the sons of Nechtan, asking eagerly:

'Are those Nechtan's sons of whom men say that they have slain more men of Ulster than are now alive?'

'They are.'

'Then drive to the fort.'

On a green in front of the fort was a stone pillar, with an inscription saying that no man entering the green might leave it without challenging one of the men of the fort. After reading this Cohoolin put his arms round the stone and loosened it and heaved it into the water close by. 'It is no better there than where it was,' said Jubar. But Cohoolin bade him spread out the chariot coverings for a bed, and he threw himself down and slept.

As Jubar expected, one of the men of the fort came out—Foill, the son of Nechtan.

'Whose horses are these?' he asked.

'Conachoor's piebalds.'

'So I thought. Who brought them to these borders?'

'A slip of a boy who has taken arms this day and is showing what he can do.'

'Bad luck to him, and if he was fit for battle he should never go back alive.'

'But he is not fit, he is a boy,' said Jubar in kindness.

At this Cohoolin leapt to his feet with a blush and said:

'I am fit for battle.'

'I do not think so,' sneered Foill.

'Then thou shalt learn the truth. Go fetch thy weapons. I do not slay charioteers, messengers, or people of that sort, or those without weapons.' While Foill ran to arm himself Jubar told Cohoolin that this

man could not be wounded by point of spear or edge of sword. Cohoolin scoffed at the warning: he knew what to do. He took a ball of iron and threw it at the approaching warrior. It struck him in the middle of the forehead and broke in and out again behind, so that the air went through where the brain had been. Cohoolin cut off his head and kept it.

Now a second son of Nechtan, named Tuachell, came out.

'Thou needest not boast,' he said.

'I do not boast of killing one man,' retorted Cohoolin.

'Then thou wilt never boast, for thou shalt die by this hand,' said Tuachell.

'Get thy weapons,' said Cohoolin.

Tuachell went away rapidly. Jubar was anxious: he told Cohoolin that if Tuachell was not slain by the first blow he would never be slain. The boy took Conachoor's spear called the Venomous, and at the first approach of Tuachell pierced him through with it so that he died.

At this Fainnle, the youngest of Nechtan's sons, came out.

'Thou hast been fighting with simpletons,' he said, and asked Cohoolin to come away from the ford to the deep water.

'Be careful,' said Jubar, 'this is Fainnle the Swallow, called so because of his swiftness in the water.'

'But I also have swum in the water, in the river at Emania,' said Cohoolin.

Fainnle and Cohoolin walked into the ford, and when they could no longer walk they began to wrestle. Cohoolin did not trouble to drown his foe, but cut off his head and let the body drift down stream. After that, Cohoolin and Jubar harried the fort and set fire

to it and took away with them the three heads of Nechtan's sons.

On their way towards Emania they saw a herd of what Cohoolin thought were very restless cattle. They were the wild deer of that country. The boy was eager to catch them, but the fat chariot horses could not come up with the wild deer. So he dismounted, and ran down two of the great stags and fastened them unhurt to his chariot. Further on they saw a flock of wild swans. Cohoolin asked if they were tame swans or wild, and, learning that they were wild, wanted to know whether it would be more creditable to bring them back dead or alive. 'Any one may bring them back dead,' said Jubar. So Cohoolin fitted a small stone into his sling and hurled it and entangled eight of the swans together. At another cast he caught twice as many, and he fastened all of them to his chariot.

Under the full moon Cohoolin drove into the palace courts with the heads of the sons of Nechtan bumping on his chariot sides, the deer racing at the back, and the swans flying behind them. The calling of the swans, with their long trumpet necks, awakened the palace, and the king's messenger called out:

'Behold a warrior coming in his chariot, O King. He is alone. He is beautiful and terrible to see, and the bleeding heads of his enemies hang on his chariot. Stags of the mountain follow behind and white birds fly after him, because they must.'

By this Conachoor knew that Cohoolin had returned from his first day's adventure, and had shown himself worthy of the sword, the spear, the shield, and the chariot. 'Old Morann was right,' thought the king, 'when he prophesied at the boy's birth that the praise of him should be on the lips of kings, warriors, and

bards. Would that we could keep him for ever to guard our fords and lead our armies. But I should not be surprised if Cathbad was right also when he said that his course would be swift and soon to end; for never before was there a young warrior who did deeds like these on his first day.'

FATHER AND SON

WHEN Cohoolin was a youth he went to Scotland to learn tricks of fighting from Scathach, one of the wild queens of that country. He was with her for a long time, and used to fight in her battles. Her most powerful enemy was another queen, named Eefa, and Cohoolin first slew Eefa's chief warriors, then overcame the Queen herself at single combat. This he did by a trick. Before going into battle he had asked Queen Scathach what it was Eefa most loved, and she told him: 'Her two horses, her chariot and her charioteer.' So when Eefa had broken Cohoolin's sword in the fight he called out suddenly, 'Look, look, Eefa's chariot has fallen over the precipice!' At this Eefa looked round towards where Cohoolin was looking, and instantly he seized her, and had her in his power. Having conquered this queen, he did not return at once to Scathach's country, but stayed with Eefa and made her his bride. When at last he was about to leave her, he said that if the child born to her were a boy, he should bear the name Conla. He left a ring for the expected boy, and as soon as it would fit his finger he was to come to Erin; but he was to tell no one his name and history; and he was never to refuse a challenge to battle.

The child was born and, as Cohoolin had hoped, it was a boy, and he was called Conla. He grew up worthy of such a father and such a mother, tall and beautiful and strong, and he knew not fear.

Cohoolin forgot Eefa, and Conla he never knew. It was part of Cohoolin's reputation that he had no children. Men said that this was why Cohoolin was so little afraid of death, because he had no son to watch growing up. They said that this also was why he thought so much of fame after death, because no son of his would be living after him to carry on his name and some likeness of his beauty and courage. As Cohoolin lived without a child, so Conla lived without a father. His mother taught him the same arts of battle as Cohoolin, and he became a great warrior. He asked his mother about his father, and, under promise of secrecy, she told him that his father was Cohoolin. Sometimes the boy had a great longing to see so glorious a warrior; sometimes he felt that he could hate the man who had left Queen Eefa and himself and never returned. When Conla had learned everything that can be learnt without wrinkles and grey hair and hollow teeth, she gave him Cohoolin's ring, and sent him to Erin. 'Remember,' she said, 'tell no man thy name or history, and whatever man shall challenge thee to combat, fight him. Thy father would do the same.'

In Erin every one loved him at first for his comeliness and his open ways. Many a girl would have been glad to have him for a lover or husband, but to those who spoke of love he answered:

'No. This is not my country, and I shall return alone to whence I came. I will not leave a son behind me as my father did, nor a wife as my mother was left.'

They asked who was his father, and who his mother, and if they were still alive; but he would not tell. He would not even tell his name. Nevertheless he made one exception. One maid who loved him looked at him with eyes which he could not resist, and he said, 'I am

bound not to refuse a challenge, and there is one in thine eyes now which I must accept.' Her eyes said that she feared him to be treacherous, unwilling to tell her anything because he could thus easily slip away to his own country and not be followed. Therefore he told her that he was Cohoolin's son, and had come from Scotland where lived his mother, Queen Eefa; and he gave her the ring from off his finger. He begged her to tell nobody, and she promised. Then, angry with her for making him break his promise, he tore himself away and left her.

The men did not take it quite so easily when Conla refused to tell his name. But when they challenged him he did not refuse that, and, each and all, he either slew them or drove them away running at such a pace that they were invited to become messengers for the king. Of every one whom he met upon the roads of Erin he inquired about Cohoolin. They told him grand and fantastic tales of combat against odds, and how the hero's face looked when he was angry and in a difficulty, how his hair stiffened and his eyes bulged, and he seemed many times the size of his opponent, and how a light, which they called 'the hero-light', shone upon him at such times, and upon him alone.

Conla knew from the stories that he would have no difficulty in recognizing Cohoolin. Time after time, when he had listened to some one telling of Cohoolin's courage or generosity, he started forward again on his road to seek his father. But then he remembered that when he found Cohoolin he would not be able to reveal himself. If his father recognized him, and said, 'Art thou Conla, the son of Eefa?' he would not have to deny it, or even be silent. But if his father asked, 'Who art thou?' he must refuse, as he had done to many others.

At this thought he became gloomy, and wished to turn back. His mother had, however, laid him under another promise, which was that he was never to turn back. Remembering this, he went on until he came to Dundalk, by the sea.

In Dundalk, Conall the Victorious, riding in a chariot, stopped him upon the road and saluted him, saying:

'Young man, come up with me into the chariot, and tell me where dost thou come from, what is thy name, and what thou seekest.'

'Gladly would I ride,' said Conla, 'but I may not answer thy questions.'

'Why not?'

'I am bound not to tell my history.'

'And who bound thee?'

'I must not tell.'

'Neither shalt thou ride with me.'

'I can run as fast.'

'I warrant thou hast had practice at running.'

'If thy meaning is that I run away from enemies, I can tell thee that I have not yet learnt to do so. Wilt thou teach me?'

'Ay, easily!'

'Master, I thank thee.'

'But wilt thou fight?'

'Certainly!'

So Conla and Conall fought, and Conla was a stronger and cleverer fighter than Conall, and ended by striking his sword out of his hand. Looking into Conall's woe-begone face, he said, laughing, 'I cannot run away from a man without a sword, O warrior.'

At this moment came up another chief and, with a smile, picked up Conall's sword from the grass, and gave it to him, asking:

'Why, Conall the Victorious, are you giving away your sword as well as your name to this youth?'

'That may be. Let him be called Victorious. He will give his birth name to no one.'

'How so?'

'He refuses to tell me or any man.'

'I pray thee, tell me the name of the conqueror of Conall the Victorious,' said the new-comer, turning his face still smiling upon Conla.

At first the youth could not speak, but lost his tongue by looking long into the man's face, he knew not why. The smile of the man had annoyed him, yet he was fascinated also. He on his part seemed to be looking at Conla in the same way, and neither spoke for a little time. The elder was the first to speak. He began slowly, as if thinking of something else.

'Tell me thy name, young man, for even our enemies do not conceal their names; and, as for thee, I have a feeling that thou mightest be a dear companion to me, though thou hast begun by damaging my cousin, Conall. If it had been possible I should have said that I had known thee long ago. But long ago thou wast only an infant.'

'Chieftain,' said Conla, 'I cannot tell my name. Yet if I could for any man break my promise not to tell, it would be, I think, for thee. I also think like thee: "If it had been possible, I should have said that I had known thee long ago." Cease then to ask me. . . .'

'It is possible,' interrupted the man, 'tell me, wert thou ever in Scotland?'

'I was.'

'Didst thou know there one called Eefa, a queen in those wild glens?'

'Chieftain, I cannot answer. I am what thou seest me,

a youth acquainted with war, and, I trust, open of heart, though condemned by another to silence about myself.'

'Tell me, I pray thee.'

'I can tell nothing.'

'Wilt not?' said the man, getting angry. 'Perhaps thou wilt tell me, didst thou ever learn at the school of Scathach in Scotland? . . . Thou art silent. . . . Then thou shalt answer by deeds. Wilt thou fight?'

'I must.'

'Thou shalt,' said the man, his face now utterly changed into a grisly face such as might make a man wonder why warriors do not eat their enemies. It did not frighten Conla; neither did it make him quick to defend himself. He had not forgotten the strange love which he felt for this chieftain at the first sight, and he said:—

'I am ready. Nevertheless, O chieftain, if I could refuse any man battle it would be thee.'

His opponent was restless to begin, and opened the fighting. At first they were so nearly matched that an onlooker might have thought each was only striking blows to give the other the glory of showing his skill in avoiding them. The two fighters were like twin trees in a storm; they rock together, and however their great arms may plunge they never wound one another, though the little twigs may chafe and a few leaves fall to the ground. Conla first drew blood, and was astonished. He was sorry for this, but sorrier when he saw the result. His enemy's head was now lit up by a strange light that touched nothing else, and he knew that this was the hero light of the stories, that this man was certainly his father. He began to think rapidly of what he should do, what he should say, how to stop the fight; and he tried at the same time to use all his defensive cunning with the sword, for he could not bear to die just now. But

thinking spoilt the skill of his eyes and arms; he was bewildered; for one moment he ceased to be able either to think or to use his sword except for wild slashes. In that moment Cohoolin struck him a great blow; and now he had no need any longer of thinking or using the sword, because he was near death.

As Cohoolin bent over the youth, he remembered how twenty years before he had bent over Queen Eefa. Conla's hair was over his face, hiding all but his eyes, and the conqueror saw that the eyes looking through the hair were like Eefa's.

'Young man,' he said, 'I would rather it was I that had to die. I fear that thou gavest me thy life, for it was too easily taken from such a warrior as thou wert. And now since thou hast given thy life, give also thy name, for that is nothing.'

'Nay, but it is something,' muttered Conla.

'How so?'

'I may not tell.'

'Then I will make an exchange. I will give thee mine. If a name is something, then mine is something. It is Cohoolin.'

'Thou givest me nothing. I knew thee already. Farewell, Cohoolin.'

Cohoolin kissed him, and then he died.

The hero stood long in thought over the body, until he heard a strange woman's voice crying. She came nearer and nearer, crying so bitterly that it made Cohoolin's mouth quiver. When she caught sight of him a fearful look came into her eyes, but she ceased to cry and ran towards him, saying:

'O mighty Cohoolin, hast thou seen a young man passing by, a beautiful young man, a very brave young man, a generous young man?'

'Maidens find many such, O maiden.

'There is no other like this.'

'What is his name?'

'I cannot tell,' she said, coming up to Cohoolin; then seeing the body, with one cry of 'Conla!' she fell over it.

'Conla! yes, it was Conla!' cried out Cohoolin. 'Conla! Conla! I slew thee half in anger, because thy mother hates me; and thou perhaps had loved me. I looked in vain for thy ring, and I see that thou hadst given it to one thou lovedst above thy father.'

His sorrow was horrible to see, and his cries drew many thither. His face wore the same look as in battle, but worse than his companions had ever seen. They looked on in silence, now and then stepping forward as if to lead him away, or beg him to spare himself, but stepping back again hastily from that ghastly face. He gripped his sword, and every moment they expected him to set upon them. At last Cathbad the Druid put him under a spell. By this spell Cohoolin saw the waves of the sea close by like a host of his enemies, and he rushed among them, striking greater blows than he had ever struck before. Night fell, and still he fought with the waves. Not until morning broke did he cease, because he was too tired to lift up his sword. He fell forward into the waters, and would have drowned had not those who watched him rushed in and carried him ashore.

THE BATTLE OF THE COMPANIONS

THE rest of Erin was fighting with Ulster to win for Queen Maeve the brown bull of Cooley in Ulster. But Maeve with all her cleverness and the strength of her champions could not overcome Cohoolin, even though the rest of Ulster, to a man, lay powerless under a magic sleep. He took no rest from fighting until Sualtam, his father, gave him a sleeping draught, unknown to him. In three days and three nights of sleep his wounds were healed, so that he rose as fresh as the sun. None could defeat him.

At last Queen Maeve persuaded Ferdia to go against him. Ferdia had been Cohoolin's mate in the fighting schools of his boyhood, and he was the equal of Cohoolin save in one feat only. For a time Ferdia had long refused the battle, for he had no wish to fight with his old companion. But Maeve sent to him men with clever and poisonous tongues who excited him by threats of shame and disgrace. He was persuaded because he had rather suffer the swords and arrows of a warrior than these men's speeches. If he conquered he was to have great rewards.

When Cohoolin heard that Ferdia was coming against him he said to Fergus: 'This battle will make a story.'

Ferdia's men were sad because they knew that either he or Cohoolin was sure to die. On the night before the battle Ferdia fell asleep slowly and then slept heavily until dawn. After that he could sleep no more for thinking of the battle. His charioteer, seeing that he

was anxious, tried to keep him back, but he went down early to the ford where he was to meet Cohoolin. 'The raven,' he said, 'is going to croak over that ford.' When they reached the water his charioteer spread out skins for him in the chariot and he slept again.

Cohoolin had gone easily to sleep and though he also wakened early he was not anxious, and he lay in bed until the sun was above the hills, lest it should be thought that anxiety had kept him from rest. As he started the demons and powers of the air muttered and whimpered and shrieked round about him and they made him very terrible to see. His chariot's thunder and the clashing of his arms awakened Ferdia beside the ford. The charioteer looked hard at the two horses of Cohoolin, the grey one with the long mane, and the black one with the tufted mane. It seemed to him that the chariot bore down upon them like a hawk from a cliff.

Ferdia looked up and saw the clods of earth scattered high by the two chariot horses. Through these clods, which were like birds in the air, he saw the grey horse and the black, the chariot pole of silver rising and falling, the yoke of gold, the purple hood and green fittings of the chariot. The rider was a man with thick black hair, as smooth as if a cow had licked it, and grey eyes gleaming under black brows. This, Ferdia knew at once, was Cohoolin, famous for his beauty, his wisdom, his skill in games and battle, and his too great daring. His purple tunic with white borders floated over his shoulders, clasped at his breast by a brooch of gold. His long white cloak had a border of flaming red. His gold-hilted sword lay across his knees: his right hand grasped a spear of ash wood. The shield on his back was purple surrounded by a circle of silver and chased with gold in the shapes of beasts. A dart lay ready

beside him. The charioteer was a tall, stooping man, with a freckled face and curly red hair: he wore a winged cloak and he goaded the horses with a little goad of red gold. Ferdia's charioteer was fain to admire Cohoolin, and praised him so that Ferdia said angrily: 'Thou wert paid for this praise.'

Cohoolin rose up and looked forward out of the chariot. Recognizing the figure and look of this man Ferdia forgot that Cohoolin was his adversary. He was about to hail him cheerfully when their eyes met across the ford. They looked in silence. The few years since they had met had done something which kept the words on their lips unspoken. 'I am happy at thy coming,' said Ferdia. But these were the words of a foe. 'This is not a friend's welcome,' said Cohoolin. 'A welcome from thee would have pleased me at any other time, and it is I should give the welcome, for this is my country.' 'But thou wert never in my country,' Ferdia replied, a little angry. He reminded Cohoolin that at school, he being the younger, he used to tie up Ferdia's spears for him and make his bed. 'A year's difference among lads,' said Cohoolin, 'is much. What is it to men, Ferdia? But why shouldst thou fight because Maeve desires it? Thou wert my heart companion.' But Ferdia interrupted: 'Have done. We have to fight and to-morrow thy head shall be on a pole.' Cohoolin went on:

'When we were last in the same battle, Ferdia, we were fighting side by side against the enemy of both. We have fought together. We have been in troubles together. We have journeyed together in the wild places. We shared thoughts about all things. We were not separated night or day. Break not thy vow of friendship to please a woman.'

Ferdia remained silent; then he said: 'Enough, Cohoolin!'

'Choose then,' said Cohoolin, 'the weapons for to-day, Ferdia. For thou wert the first at the ford, and by a long time, I think.'

Ferdia chose hurling weapons, and they began to fight. The air hummed with the flying to and fro of the javelins. Each warrior was a deadly perfect thrower, but each was also able to guard himself against any throw. No blood was drawn.

'That is enough ceremony,' said Ferdia after a time, 'let us fight with spears.' Then they took their long spears. Both were so eager in the conflict that they attacked better than they guarded. Each bled and each drew blood, and at evening Ferdia said: 'Let us rest for a time, Cohoolin.'

'If it is time, let us rest,' said Cohoolin. They threw down their weapons and kissed one another. For a moment they drew apart somewhat and looked keenly in one another's faces; but they saw no evil. That night their charioteers sat together about one fire, and the horses of both men shared a stable. Whatever good ointments and lotions for his wounds were applied to Cohoolin, he sent some to Ferdia lest it might be said, if he had the victory, that it was because he was better healed. Whatever good foods and inspiriting draughts were brought to Ferdia, he sent half to Cohoolin; for there were more men to provide for him than for Cohoolin.

On the next day Cohoolin chose the weapons. They fought in their chariots, using heavy broad spears. They carved one another with hideous wounds, and they fought without resting until evening. The charioteers as well as the warriors were tired out. 'Let us

stop,' said Cohoolin, 'our horses are weary and our charioteers have no spirit left.' And Ferdia said: 'So let it be.' They kissed one another and forgot their anger. The professors of healing came with ointments and spells and charms; and as before Cohoolin sent part of the best of everything to Ferdia, and Ferdia sent him the best meats and drinks. Their horses were together and the charioteers lay down by the same fire.

Ferdia's face the next day was clouded. 'Thou art not thyself,' said Cohoolin. 'I know not what it is,' he answered, 'but it is not fear.' Cohoolin reproached him again for having come at the bidding of a woman.

'A man must die,' said Ferdia, 'and he cannot keep away from the place where he has to die.'

'But thou thyself,' said Cohoolin, 'art the cause of this trouble. A woman has persuaded thee.'

'I could not return except in disgrace,' was the reply.

'Oh, Ferdia!' said Cohoolin, 'there is no man or woman who could have persuaded me to do thee evil.'

Ferdia was gloomy. 'Maeve has destroyed me,' he said, 'not thou. The victory is thine, not the fault.'

'I have no strength,' said Cohoolin, 'to fight thee.'

Nevertheless, in spite of their old spotless friendship, they fought again. They used their great swords and attacked one another as if they were nothing but swords to cut and bodies to be hewn and pierced. The sword of Cohoolin could not rest away from Ferdia, nor Ferdia's away from Cohoolin. They were well matched for courage, for stubbornness, and for bloodiness, but in the evening it was Ferdia that said, 'Let us stop now, Cohoolin.' 'If it is time,' said he, 'then let us stop.' Both were sad and silent. That night the horses and charioteers of the two champions were not together.

Ferdia rose early on the next morning. He knew

well that this day would be the last of the fight, and for one or both of them the last day of life. He went down alone to the ford. Before Cohoolin appeared, he had put on his battle dress, his helmet of many jewels, his apron of brown leather, and over that a stone like a millstone, and over that again an apron of iron. Already he grasped his sharp spear in his right hand, his curved sword hung against his left thigh, and he had slung his huge bossy shield upon his back. On this day he was expecting Cohoolin to use against him the thirty-barbed harpoon which no man had yet escaped.

They were slow to begin the fight. At first they put forth their powers, not against each other, but to show off their many warlike and athletic feats of dazzling skill and unimagined strength. They seemed to forget one another in the pride of this display, except that once or twice an extraordinary sign of strength or cunning made the adversary pause from his part to give a look of curiosity—of admiration—even of dread. Once Cohoolin paused, and, after watching Ferdia, turned to his charioteer and told him that if he showed signs of yielding in the coming battle, he was to taunt and jeer at him to increase his rage. But, after one of these pauses, Ferdia had no heart left for the vain show. He began to fight in earnest.

This was, from the beginning, the worst battle. Their strength and their fury had grown together. Cohoolin had never been so furious or so strong but Ferdia was his equal. Then Cohoolin's charioteer began to taunt his master and to praise Ferdia. 'Art thou playing, Cohoolin?' he asked. 'Ferdia is playing with thee. He is like a hawk among small birds.' Then Cohoolin was contorted by one of the violent rages which had made him as famous as his beauty and prowess. He

quivered all over. His muscles were bunched together, his veins stood out like ivy-stems about a tree. One of his eyes sank deep in his head, the other bulged. His mouth was stretched from ear to ear, and twisted so that he who looked at it could not take away his eyes. Foam dropped from his lips. His heart hammered aloud. His hair, already tangled in the fight, stood up stiff until it was like some mass of thorns filling a hedge-gap. So swollen was he that he seemed another man, or not a man, but a giant.

Cohoolin and Ferdia grappled one another until they were more like one writhing four-armed and four-legged monster than two men. Spear after spear had been bent up or broken in pieces. They could no longer see one another, but they had eyes in arms and feet and weapons. The spears and shields had eyes to wound and to avoid wounds. The inhuman glen folk and goblins that are as light and quick as echoes and more frightful than any dream, clung to their shield-rims, their sword-hilts, their spear-shafts, and flew away and returned again like swallows to a roof. The trampling of the heroes turned the river out of its course, but the river-bed where they fought was none the drier for that because of their blood. As they reeled this way or that, in the drunkenness of the fight, their followers rushed to and fro like children when a chained bull suddenly breaks loose. The bellowing and the groaning alarmed the horses, and sent them all galloping away in madness of fear. All the men who had not been trampled down by the fighters and horses set off in pursuit. The women hid themselves. Only Cohoolin's charioteer remained looking on. It was well that he did. For Ferdia gave Cohoolin a great wound with his sword, and the hero staggered. Then he called for his gaebolg with its

thirty barbs that opened like the fin of a perch inside the wound. At the mere sound of the weapon's name, when Cohoolin called to his charioteer, Ferdia made a downward motion of his shield to where he already had the aprons of iron and leather and the millstone to protect him. In so doing, his unguarded breast was pierced by a spear. The gaebolg followed the spear. It penetrated the aprons, it split the stone asunder, and it passed into Ferdia's body and expanded its barbs. 'That', said Ferdia, 'is enough. That is the last blow. It would be well with me now, but that I mourn for having fallen by thy hand, O friend.'

Cohoolin ran to save him from falling, and bore him in his arms to his own side of the water, away from the men of Erin, who were returning to the now silent ford. There he laid Ferdia down. As he looked at the body, he grew faint, and this the men of Erin saw, and they began to move as if to come over against him. His charioteer urged him to rise. 'Why should I rise, charioteer,' said Cohoolin, 'after such a man has fallen? What use is my strength after the deed that I have done? Ferdia will never ride again. Oh, it was treachery to make him fight against me. This is not according to the vow of friendship we made when we were scholars with Queen Scathach. It is wretched that thou shouldst die thus and I remain, O Ferdia. When we were with Scathach we were never angry with one another. If thou hadst died fighting a foe, I would not have survived thee. This was an evil combat. I know now that thou wert dear to me with thy ruddy face, thy clear blue eye, thy perfect form, thy wisdom and eloquence. No one ever bore shield like thee in battle. Now I remember how I slew Eefa's only son—my own son, but unknown until too late. Since that

youth, I have never found one like thee in might and courage, nor one whom it was so ill to have slain. It is vain for thee now to expect Finnavar, Maeve's beautiful daughter, O Ferdia.'

Presently he ordered his charioteer to take the gaebolg out of the body. The weapon was drawn out of Ferdia, and Cohoolin looked long at it and at the man whose death it was. 'Come now, Cohoolin,' said the charioteer, 'let us be going. We have been here too long.' 'Yes, we will go,' he said. 'O charioteer, every other fight of mine was a game compared with this. Fighting was a sport without a sting until to-day. O Ferdia, yesterday thou wert greater than a mountain. To-day thou art less than a shadow.' The men of Erin buried him.

Cohoolin had so many wounds that all were as one. Only his shield hand was untouched. They bore him to be bathed in the rivers of Muirhevna, rivers of his boyhood, mingled with healing herbs. His father Sualtam heard his groans and came to him. But Cohoolin bade him not to weep and think of revenge, but to go to Navan and tell King Conachoor that now he could not alone defend Ulster against all Erin. So his father mounted Cohoolin's warhorse and galloped to Navan. Twice he shouted in the palace courts: 'Men are dying, women are carried off, cattle are stolen, in Ulster.' The men of Ulster were not roused from their magic sleep. He shouted a third time and wakened Cathbad the Druid, but the druid only cursed him for shouting while Conachoor slept. Sualtam turned his horse round in a fury. The horse reared, and struck the sharp edge of his shield against the rider's neck, so that he died. But his dead head was carried by the galloping steed still

crying about the palace: 'Men are dying, women are carried off, cattle are stolen, in Ulster.'

King Conachoor was wakened. He gathered the men of Ulster, and they fought a great battle with the rest of Erin. The sound of the uncertain conflict roused Cohoolin from his repose among the rivers of Muirhevna. He mounted his chariot and drove quickly, and his fury decided the victory for Ulster; and with a great slaughter of Maeve's warriors he took vengeance for Ferdia's death.

THE DEATH OF COHOOLIN

THREE monstrous brothers and their three crooked sisters, all of the same age, travelled over the world between Ireland and Babylon, learning magic to destroy Cohoolin. He had killed Calatin their father and their twenty-seven hideous brothers, in battle; they wanted revenge, and it was Queen Maeve of Connaught who counselled them to study magic in order to obtain it. They listened to the spells and read the books of all the wizards who lived in the forests and caves and cities of the world. They went down to Hell itself, and brought back with them three swords, three knives, and three spears, the most poisonous that ever were; and it was said that with these they would destroy three kings.

While these brothers and sisters blinked in the darkness, thinking and thinking how to fight Cohoolin by magic, Queen Maeve set against him others who fought with swords. There were the kings of North Munster, of Tara, and of Leinster, and many others whose fathers he had slain. They invaded Ulster at a time when all its warriors except Cohoolin lay under enchantment, and could not fight. His friends begged him to wait, but he was not willing, because he knew that he was a match for any of the kings, and as for poisonous Calatin's poisonous brood of monsters he feared them no more than toads or bats. He did not know, what his friends knew, that if he fought now he was certain to die. He knew that he could only die once, and that was on the day appointed by fate; until then he could go on con-

quering. Nevertheless, the men and women who loved him pleaded and implored him, and for two days they kept him from fighting, but only with difficulty. They had the help of the sweetest singers and the most noble poets. The women danced in their loveliest dresses before him ; the poets chanted for him poems that made words stronger and more beautiful than anything else in the world of men or Nature ; the melodies of the singers must have been woven by magic, because they were as pure and sweet as flowers, and yet they were full of the feeling which is in the speech of mothers, of children, of friends, and of lovers. So Cohoolin sat down, and they tempted him with wine and delicious food. But they could never be sure that the dance, or poem, or song, or wine would not excite him to do exactly what they wished him not to do. At one moment these things soothed him, at another they stirred him. He listened to a song, and his thoughts became happy, but gradually floated away altogether from the cause of the song, and he would stand and look as if King Erc of Tara were within a sword's length of him.

One maiden sang about the hosts of faery. They carry white shields with devices of silver, glittering swords and mighty blue horns. Their bands of pale curly-headed warriors march amid blue spears before their fair chieftain. They scatter their enemies, and every land they invade they leave desolate. It is no wonder their strength is great, for they are all sons of queens and kings ; they have manes of beautiful golden-yellow upon their heads, smooth comely bodies, teeth like crystal, and fine red lips. They are good at slaughter ; they make good songs, and sing them sweetly ; and they are clever at games of skill. At the sound of the word 'horns', Cohoolin's mind began to travel joyfully through

forests echoing with the horns of his companions, and so it wandered until he heard the words, 'They are good at slaughter.' At this he cried, as if he had been thinking of nothing else, 'Then let them know their better', and he lifted his sword and made strokes in the air such as might have drawn blood from the wind, or made a sunbeam shriek out, and the singer fled away. Or if the wine calmed him, he felt himself going off into useless sloth, and shame roused him to think of action; no enemy appearing then could have escaped him.

It was not only his own love of battle and hate of idleness that had to be overcome by song and dance and poem, and the presence of friend and lover. Often when he seemed to be swooning pleasantly in the music, like a wasp in honey, he could hear noises of battle. These were not sounds recalled by memory, for clear as these often were, there was a difference between them and the real clamour of swords on shields, of chariot wheels and trumpets, and men in fury or agony. He thought that the kings were ravaging Ulster. Those thunders were their chariots—he leapt to the door. There they were, burning the houses and crops of the men of Ulster, carrying off their cattle. 'Why do you stay here?' he cried to those around him. 'Yonder is the enemy! Charge, men of Ulster!' and he charged out into the midst of the host that he saw, and slew right and left. But he drew no blood, and left not a corpse on the earth. 'They are the enchantments of Calatin's children,' said his friends. 'The King of Tara would never venture so near. These are fairy warriors, made by incantation out of thistle-down, puff-balls, and withered leaves. They are nothing, and they can do nothing. Shall they alarm Cohoolin? Is Ulster afraid of thistle-down? Will Cohoolin go out to fight with puff-balls, and waste his strength

on withered leaves? As to the children of Calatin, thou canst no more fight with them than with gnats.'

'Fight with the children of Calatin?' he exclaimed. 'There are but six of them, all born at one birth, like rats, and did I not fight against their twenty-seven brothers and their father all together?'

He was ashamed when he knew that he had been valiant against phantoms, and he turned from these enchantments to those of singers and poets. He heard them singing and chanting of men who were now, as he would be some day, kept alive on the lips of men by fame after death. He tried to think what it would be like to be dead, and to be known only in a song or poem. But when he had thought how glorious to have beautiful maidens singing, and noble poets writing poems about him, he could think no further, and therefore it seemed to him as good to be famous after death as it was to do deeds worthy of fame. Yet to sit there, listening to music, was not worthy of fame, and up he leapt in a rage that the trumpets of the three kings should be sounding just outside. They were about to attack this very house when Cohoolin emerged. At sight of him they turned their chariots, and drove away. Furiously he pursued them until he came in sight of a far larger army beyond a river. This was the real army of the three hostile kings, and in an hour he would have been amongst them had he continued the chase. Now, however, he saw a small band of Ulster men approaching him on their way to Conachoor, and they were right in the path of the flying enemy. Yet neither did these few men slip aside out of the way of the host, nor did the host take notice of the men, but kept on in its flight. The Ulster men were hid among them for a moment, and then re-appeared as if they had passed through smoke. Cohoolin

shouted to them, 'Follow them, follow!' but they took no notice, and when he came nearer they asked in astonishment, 'Is it thy shadow thou art chasing, Cohoolin, for lack of an enemy?'

'I chase the host which ye have passed through.'

'We have seen no one for an hour, Cohoolin. Thou hast been listening too much to the poets and singers, so that thou canst not tell the difference between a few words and a man with a sword.'

He returned to the house. Once again he tried to look out, because the enemy seemed to be whispering at every inch of the walls and roof in the darkness; but the venerable druids surrounded him, and told him that it was magic only, and that there was not enough of the enemy to shake the bee out of the blossom.

Early on the next morning, Conachoor called together the druids and singers and poets, and the friends and lovers of Cohoolin, and asked them how they were going to keep him from the fight that day, and, still weary from the past day, all of them answered that they knew no way. Wherefore Conachoor advised them to take the hero into the Deaf Glen, where he could escape the sounds of enchantment. This was a glen so cut off from the remainder of the earth, that if all the men of Ireland were gathered close to it and yelled their war cries no one within could hear anything. They had already tried to persuade him into the glen, but in vain. Cathbad the Druid stood close to Cohoolin, and invited him to come to a feast in the Deaf Glen. Niav the golden-haired knelt beside him and kissed him and asked him to come; and she was one whom he never used to refuse. Again Cathbad spoke, and Cohoolin said:

'Shall I be feasting while all Ireland is preparing against Ulster, and I alone of the chiefs am free from

the magic? If ye had not spoilt me, I would have killed those kings and scattered their armies before now.'

As he spoke he seemed to be listening to something. Then his wife Emer said to him:

'O my first love and all men's darling, favourite of the poets of Erin, come with me and with Niav and Cathbad to the feast.'

Cathbad reminded him that it was unlucky for him not to accept an invitation to a feast. He rose up, therefore, but with a sick heart, and went in with them to the Deaf Glen.

'The enemy,' he moaned, 'will say that I came hither to escape from them.'

'But they will not believe it,' said Cathbad.

He had got ready a vast mansion within the glen. At one end sat Cohoolin, with the poets on his right and Niav and the other women on his left; at the opposite end the singers and harpers and dancers performed; and it was full of laughter and music and glad faces. Outside stood Cohoolin's two horses, the Grey of Macha and the black, tended by his charioteer, Laegh the son of Riangabar.

At daybreak the daughters of Calatin came looking for Cohoolin; but they could not find him anywhere in Emania. Then they rose up into the air and flew this way and that like buzzards, their wings moaning and making a wind that supported them. They flew for a long time until the two horses standing in the glen betrayed Cohoolin. As on the day before, the witches took thistle-down and puff-balls and dead leaves and made them into an army covering the hills and valleys round about. Where a moment before there had been nothing, now armed men were swarming. It was as when a man turns up a spadeful of earth and suddenly all is alive with

ants. This multitude shrieked and made all the sounds of battle, of men conquering and being conquered, of the angry and the wretched, of horns and trumpets, of women weeping over the horrible things they saw or dreaded, of children sobbing, of goblins and all inhuman things that haunt wild places and neighbourhoods of war and death. The glen was as full of this tumult as water is of wetness, and the women in the hall raised their voices to keep it from Cohoolin. Nevertheless he heard it and deemed it the triumphant enemy and his dying countrymen; surely now the time of battle had come. But Cathbad told him these noises were mockeries made by Calatin's children. The singers sang, the poets chanted, the dancers danced. The witches grew weary of their useless enchantments, and one of them named Bibe thought of another deceit. Changing herself into the form of one of Niav's attendants she called to her mistress and, when Niav came out with her women, lured them away and bewitched them and lost them in the glen. Next she took the shape of Niav herself, for she knew that it was Niav who had made Cohoolin promise not to attack the men of Erin without her permission.

'Cohoolin,' she said, 'Ulster is being laid waste and the people will blame me because thou gavest me a promise not to go out against the enemy. I release thee. Go quickly and scatter them.'

'It is hard to know what a woman means,' said Cohoolin, 'but a little time past and what thou desiredst above all other things was that I should not fight.'

As he rose up the edge of his mantle was under one foot and he was jerked back again into his seat. Red with shame he sprang up a second time, and the force of the spring shot his gold mantle pin up to the roof, and

falling down it entered his foot. 'The pin is a foe,' he said, 'but the cloak was a friend, warning me. I know what is to happen.' He stepped swiftly outside into the air. The women and the poets crowded round him, but no one could stop him now. He called to Laegh and bade him make ready the chariot. The witch disappeared. Now Niav herself spoke to him, saying: 'I would not have given thee leave to go, not for the world; it was one of Calatin's daughters who took my shape and deceived thee. O Cohoolin, stay with us, stay with me.' He could not believe her, and he repeated his orders to Laegh. The horses knew better; they refused to be caught. The Grey of Macha, who used always to come up at the shaking of the reins, now ran away, shedding tears of blood. Cohoolin himself ran after him, but not until Laegh had come round on the other side could he be caught.

Cohoolin would not stay for farewells. He leapt into his chariot and at once set out, though it seemed to him a sign of evil that his weapons fell down from their places when he mounted. Among the weapons were the three spears brought up from Hell by Calatin's children.

On the green of Emania he saw horses and armed men in thousands equipped for battle. He could hear the shouting of plunderers, and saw smoke darkening the sky, and flames making a witches' daylight. Presently he saw foemen upon the roof of the palace itself—they were murdering Emer—they tossed her out—everywhere there were flames, and he cried out bitterly because he had been kept back. Cathbad caught him up and told him that these men were made out of an old woman's apronful of dead leaves. 'But I also am enchanted,' muttered Cohoolin. 'Was I myself made out

of more than a dead leaf? O Cathbad, go and preach to the unenchanted.' He hastened to Emer's bower. There she sat, as fresh and quiet as a newly opened flower, but shedding tears for him. She asked him to enter, but he would not.

'Look at the enemy!' he said, 'and there is only me to oppose them.'

'They are phantoms, Cohoolin, such as even I could oppose.'

'Girl, I will never stop until I have assaulted the enemy.'

His mother, Dectora, tried to keep him back, or at least to wait until his cousin Conall the Victorious could join him.

'No,' he said, 'if I am to die then I cannot hide away from death. If I am not to die nothing can hurt me. In any case, what is there to fear? I have been through more than I believe I shall ever see again, and I never feared it nor do I now think that there was cause to fear. If my time has come it is not friendly to keep me back to die under a roof. And fame outlives life.'

All wailed for him as he departed with only Cathbad in his company.

At the first ford they saw a slender maiden with yellow hair and body as white as milk bending over the water. She was weeping as she washed and wrung out the blood from garments that were all crimson.

'Do you see that, Cohoolin?' said Cathbad. 'That is Bibe's daughter. It is thy garments she is washing out, and by that thou mayst know what will be the end of fighting for thee to-day.'

'Be not troubled, Cathbad. What if this daughter of a witch be washing blood out of those garments? Maybe they belong to those who are to perish by this sword

and spear. But whatever be the truth, do not strive to make me as unhappy as thou art at my going. For if unhappiness makes me dull I shall get no glory, and still I must die. Cathbad, I know as well as thou, that to-day I shall die. Now farewell. Carry my salutes to Ulster, to the King and to Emer. Long life and health to them! I shall never see them again. This parting is a pitiful thing, and I think now of the many joyful days on foreign hills after long fighting when I have turned my face homeward towards Emer.'

Leaving Cathbad behind, Cohoolin drove alone into the midst of the enemy on the plain of Muirhevna. They saw him coming from afar off, bright like a little cornfield which the sun singles out from all others on a grey day. His sword shone bright, and a light hovered over his head. With spear and sword he reaped his way among the enemy like a reaper who is paid by the acre. The plain was covered with dead men.

The sons of Calatin had prophesied that Cohoolin's spears should slay three kings, and this made King Erc of Tara think of a trick to play on him. When Cohoolin had been lured to cast his spear at a common man, one of the enemy named Lugaid seized it.

'What shall this kill?' he asked the sons of Calatin.

'A king,' they said.

Then he hurled it and it struck Laegh, the charioteer, so that he died.

Cohoolin hurled the second spear and it was caught by Erc after it had passed through ten men.

'What shall this kill?' he asked the sons of Calatin.

'A king,' they said.

'Did ye not say the other would kill a king?'

'Yes, and it was true. It killed the king of the charioteers of Ireland.'

Then Erc threw it and struck the grey horse so that never would it again pull the chariot. Cohoolin drew out the spear, bidding his friend farewell, and the Grey went away down into the Grey Pool near by.

A third time Cohoolin hurled a spear and Lugaid caught it.

'What shall this kill?' he asked the sons of Calatin.

'A king,' they said.

'Did ye not say it would kill a king this morning when Erc threw it?'

'And so it did. The king was the Grey of Macha, king of the horses of Erin,' they answered.

Lugaid took aim with the third spear at Cohoolin and the aim was true, so that the black horse took flight, knowing that his master would certainly die. He got down from his chariot to drink at the lake, and when he had drunk he bound himself with his belt to a stone pillar, to make sure that he would be standing up when he died. In a little while there he died, but so quietly that his enemies did not know. They found him standing there horribly wounded but calm-faced, and they dared not approach him. For a time also the Grey of Macha protected him; roaming about while dying he had returned and taken his stand beside the pillar; and he slew many men with teeth and hoofs. But the birds were not afraid of him, and they perched on his master's shoulder.

'Aha!' said Erc, 'that used not to be a perching place for birds, but for Emer's head,' and Lugaid knowing now that his life was gone, smote his head off and bore it homeward. But the army of Ulster was not far behind. The magic sleep had left them and they were ready for battle. Conall the Victorious was hurrying before them to help Cohoolin, when he met the Grey

of Macha, and the horse led him to the hero's body. At sight of the horse weeping he could not keep back his tears. Then he rode away, and before that day was over he fulfilled his vow that he would avenge Cohoolin's death, for he took away from Lugaid both his head and his kingdom.

DEIRDRE AND NAISI

In the times before history Conachoor was one of the great kings of Ireland. He ruled Ulster from his capital of Navan, where he had three palaces. The greatest of these three was the House of the Red Branch. Conachoor's warriors were called the heroes of the Red Branch, and great as the king was in himself, he was greater because the most famous heroes were among his captains, and the sweetest bards and the most powerful druids were his.

One day while Conachoor was feasting at Felim the bard's house, the wife of the bard gave birth to a daughter, and immediately the druid Cathbad made a prophecy. He said that this child, Deirdre, would grow into the loveliest of all women, and her loveliness would bring death to heroes and grief and calamity to the land. The heroes of the Red Branch wished to prevent what had to be by destroying the child; even Felim the bard was willing that she should die. But Conachoor thought to make Deirdre his wife, and her life was spared and she was taken away to a solitary place hidden among the forests of the mountains. It was known only to the deer, the hare and the falcon, and to Conachoor, and those who tended her and told her stories of magnificent and of strange things—the strangest and most magnificent that were told in the days before Deirdre herself was in a tale. Sometimes the king came and looked at the child. To her he was nothing but a king; she did not know that he who had created the solitude about her was also a man. Only Conachoor hunted in the sur-

rounding forests, and the penalty on other hunters was death.

There were no other children, and so for years she lived in that wild solitude. She was its child, like stag and hare and falcon, yet she hated it. For sixteen years she saw the young oaks growing higher, and the dead old ones crumbling lower, behind the ridge of the roof; for sixteen years she saw the ancient swineherd getting more and more ancient, though each year it seemed to be impossible. When she saw herself in mirrors or in the waters of the forest she said to herself:

'They tell me I am beautiful. I cannot see it. I see the beauty of the stag running with the herd, and the hare at play with his own, and the falcon soaring with his mate, and the flower growing on the mountains which its kind has never left, but not the beauty of a girl mewed in this inhuman dark forest with old men and women.'

The swineherd was bent like a reed in winter, and yet he turned himself slowly round to follow her with his eyes, and then, when his eyes no longer saw anything, with his ears. Once Deirdre tried to escape, and as she ran through the forest she did not see the old man because he was like one of the thousands of dead trees; but suddenly as she was passing he moved to see her better, and in her surprise she struck at him so that he fell dead. In her pity for the old man she forgot her flight. She dragged him to the hut where his old wife, whom she had never seen because she could not move out, lived a still life. As the girl entered the woman stared at her, and continued to do so until she was out of sight; then only did she lament the dead man and curse his destroyer.

It consoled Deirdre little for her imprisonment to

hear the old nurse Levarcham saying that Conachoor was a pattern of kings: patient, self-controlled, affable, strict but merciful, enforcing peace but without too much terror; one in whose palace there were lighted lamps and clapping of hands for the guests, comfortable seats, cupbearers decent and busy in serving, music not in excess, stories not over long, and pleasant talk for all. Nor did she care to hear of the breadth of the king's provinces and the nobility and multitude of his princes.

One winter morning she looked out of the window and saw her fosterer killing a calf, and a raven alighting beside the crimson blood that crept through the snow.

'Red as the blood, white as the snow, black as the raven,' said Deirdre. 'I could love a man who had skin white as the snow, cheeks red as the blood, hair black as the raven.'

Levarcham heard these words and said:

'Naisi, the son of Usna is such a one.'

So Deirdre desired to see Naisi.

At first Levarcham tried to thwart her. She pointed to a poor swineherd and said that he was Naisi. Deirdre was not to be deceived; she gave the man a message for Naisi at the House of the Red Branch. In a few days came Naisi with the sound of a horn, and rode up to her whom he had not seen since she was a day old in the arms of the druid. She knew him at once as Naisi the son of Usna, with skin white as snow, cheeks red as blood, hair black as a raven, wearing a tunic with many pearls and a crimson mantle. But he did not know her, though her glance made him look at her and see that she was more beautiful than any other woman, and also different. He thought that she was not a mortal, and only stopped because the horse refused to pass her. She loved him with all her

soul and with all her body. She did but lay her hand on the red mane of his horse to hold its mouth away from her hair, and he loved her back again. They thought nothing of the commands of Conachoor. He loved her and she him. She asked him to take her out of the solitude, away from the king, and so saying she leapt up on to Naisi's horse and they rode away to the castle of the sons of Usna.

When Ainley and Ardan, the other sons of Usna, heard that this was Deirdre and that she was Naisi's wife, they were troubled. They knew that she was to have been queen, and they remembered the prophecy of Cathbad, that she would be the cause of death and calamity. Because they were afraid, Naisi told them that he and she were sailing to Alba and had no wish to damage others by their adventure. But the brothers, though troubled, would not hold back from the company of Naisi and their wondrous sister. Naisi and Deirdre rode off. Ainley and Ardan followed them to the shore. Once the brothers turned back to see why the silver of the horse ornaments was gleaming long after sunset, and they saw the fire of the burning of their castle. They looked at one another and were thinking to turn back and dispute the castle with Conachoor. Before they had spoken their thoughts they turned to consult with Naisi. Instead of Naisi they looked at Deirdre. She was laughing, but this did not anger them in spite of the burning castle. It was not the laughter of a fool, but of one who was wiser and stronger than they, though they were warriors and counsellors of a great king. They could not see her face, but only her small head, her long hair, and her bright sandalled feet as she rode, and yet they forgot their other thoughts and became silent, and continued to ride after the lovers.

Deirdre and the sons of Usna set sail for Alba. They came at nightfall within sight of the promontories of Alba, and because the wind fell they stayed that night in a bay under a cliff. There a ship came up to them, and a strange man on board of it stared hard out of a black hood at Deirdre. He begged Naisi to come to his castle, but first Naisi bade him tell his name and show his face. His name, he said, was Angus. At sight of his face Deirdre's lips whitened, and she said she would not go to his castle. When the ship had departed, Deirdre told Naisi that Angus was really the king of Alba. In a dream she had seen him standing over the dead body of Naisi, whom he had slain that he might deliver her to Conachoor.

They sailed on, and even though Deirdre was weary she could still laugh for joy of the rowing music. She grew more beautiful with the beauty of the sea, and after several days she wished that she had been a man, to think it but a little glory thus to sail in tempest along a stern coast.

They came at last under the cliffs where the castle of Usna once stood, the birthplace and playground of Naisi and Ainley and Ardan. They turned some of the jackdaws out of the ruins, and took possession. The chiefs of the country came in, and obeyed Naisi as they had obeyed his father. Angus of Alba was now dead, and they formed an alliance with the new king. Some of their time they spent with him in the north, some in their fatherland in the south. They fought in the king's battles, and second only to the beauty of Deirdre were the courage and might of the sons of Usna in the tales that were told and the songs that were sung to the harps of the mountains. Deirdre and Naisi and Ainley and Ardan hunted together, and enjoyed together the free-

dom of the mountains, the forests, and the great waters amongst them. They slept upon forest beds of brushwood, mosses and new rushes. The stags did not know the mountains, nor the cormorants know the sea, better than they. The sons of Usna forgot the palaces of Navan. Deirdre forgot her cage in the forest among the mountains. Conachoor was no more to them than a man in a story that is both dull and untrue.

But Conachoor could not and would not forget Deirdre, though he would willingly have forgotten the sons of Usna. They were to him more real than people in the tales that are like life when it is most alive. They were as true and living as the dreams that draw sweat from every inch of a man's body. When he thought of Deirdre with love, and of those brothers with hate, nothing else was real except the one fair face and the three dark faces of those distant ones; and all the royal apartments of bronze and red yew-tree wood were as dreamy before his eyes as they are before ours to-day. There were times when Navan was like a stupid dream that makes a man ashamed and is soon forgotten, and he would have rejoiced to let his capital and the House of the Red Branch and all the heroes pass away like a dream of this kind, if Deirdre or even Naisi would have come and stood in the flesh before his eyes and within his reach. Nevertheless Conachoor continued to rule at Navan. In spite of love and in spite of hate, he was very wise. Neither alone nor with an army had he crossed the sea in pursuit of the lovers. He had heard men singing songs of the beauty of Deirdre and the great deeds of Naisi, and he had not stirred. At last, after many years, he held a great feast for the nobles and princes and tributary kings of the land. Then, when they had eaten what makes men content and drunk what

makes all things seem possible, the king rose up in the hall, smiting with his rod the gong of silver above his head to make a silence.

'Is it fitting,' he asked, 'that great warriors of our land should live in exile on account of a woman? The woman is Deirdre, but the men are the sons of Usna We miss them at this board. Can we do without them, my heroes, in the ranks of battle? I will call them back before they are old.'

At this the heroes believed that Conachoor had forgiven the sons of Usna and forgotten Deirdre. They rejoiced, saying that they had themselves long thought the same though in silence. But when the king bade them set out to fetch back those three they asked:

'Who is to bring Naisi unless Naisi be willing?'

'He,' answered the king, 'he who most loves me will be able to bring back Naisi.'

While they went on with the feast, Conachoor sent for Conall the Victorious in secret, and asked him:

'If you brought back the sons of Usna under a pledge of safety, and in spite of your pledge they were killed, what would you do, Conall?'

'I,' said Conall, 'would kill the murderers, even if they murdered at your command, O King.'

'Then you, Conall, are not he that loves me best.'

So he called next Cohoolin and asked him the same question.

'I would not accept any payment but death for their death,' exclaimed Cohoolin, 'and neither bribe nor fine should save your own head if it happened by your consent, O Conachoor.'

'Neither will I send you, Cohoolin.'

Next the king asked Fergus, who replied:

'I would take vengeance for the dead upon each

and all who had a hand in it, excepting only your Majesty.'

So the king sent Fergus and commanded him not to rest going or coming, and once he was back in Ireland to send the sons of Usna straight to Navan, whatever happened. He and his two sons in a black ship sailed far among islands and round promontories until they came into Loch Etive on a hot day in summer. They saw the tents of Deirdre and the sons of Usna upon the shore, and Fergus gave a shout. Deirdre and Naisi were playing chess, and at the shout Deirdre became white.

'It is the voice of a man of Erin,' said Naisi.

'Nay,' said Deirdre, lying out of a foreboding heart, 'it is a man of Alba. Take no heed of the cry. It is nothing.'

Again Fergus cried and in a loud voice, calling the sons of Usna by their names, and still Deirdre said:

'It is a dream: play on.'

But Deirdre could not play, and Naisi would not.

At the third shout Naisi knew the voice of Fergus and sent Ardan down to the shore to welcome him. Deirdre would have held him back. Her cheeks were white as surf under the moonlight; her eyes were large, and she looked old and sick with the foreknowledge that came to her through that one cry of distant Fergus. But Naisi remembered the halls of Navan and the battle-fields of Ireland with a new joy. There was none like them in Alba, and though he had got fresh glory he had done nothing like the deeds of old, because his enemies were not great enough. He could not understand the paleness of her who had never shown fear, nor did he hear, save with ears only, when she confessed that a dream had warned her against Fergus coming to them with friendliness that meant a doom.

When he had greeted the brothers—but not Deirdre, for she stood apart—Fergus delivered the message of Conachoor:

'He desires to have back again the noblest of the heroes of the Red Branch. He offers you peace and a full welcome.'

The sons of Usna were glad, but Deirdre spoke to Fergus, saying:

'Naisi in Alba is king over a broader land than Conachoor's.'

'But', said Fergus softly, 'Erin is the home of his hero days. It has need of his prowess, and he has need of it to spend his powers against worthy foes.'

Fergus gave his word that he would be on Naisi's side if all Ireland were against him, and without looking at Deirdre Naisi promised to go, and all were glad saving her. From the ship's deck she looked back at Alba and spoke her thoughts:

'My love to thee, land of the east! I am sad to leave thy bright hills, thy rich plains, and the harbours of thy coast. O, we need not have left thee. Lovely and marvellous,' she said, 'is the land of Alba, and I would not have left it except with Naisi. The time now seems short that I spent in Alba with Naisi. Many days there we ate fish and venison and badger's fat, and slept solitary in the tall grass under its precipices or on the calm waters. There we made our first house together in Glen Etive where the sun dwelt as a cow in its fold. The singing of the cuckoos on the branches was sweet in Alba. There Naisi was gladder than any man. The very white sand under the waters of Alba was dear to me, and I would not have left that country except with my beloved.'

They landed in Erin and came to the house of Borrach, and by Conachoor's command Borrach bade Fergus to a feast. He reddened with anger but he could not refuse. 'Do what Borrach bids you,' said Deirdre in scorn, 'yet the forsaking of the sons of Usna is a high price for the feast.' They left Fergus, therefore, and with his two sons took the road to Navan. Deirdre tried to delay them by many pleadings and prophecies. Once she fell behind and was missed. They found her sleeping beside the track. She awoke with terrified eyes and Naisi asked:

'What is it, Deirdre?'

'A dream, Naisi. I dreamed that I saw the sons of Usna and the sons of Fergus under a cloud of blood, and only on the younger son of Fergus could I see a head. Wait. Turn back. Go anywhere, but avoid Conachoor, lest the dream come true.'

But Naisi would not delay or turn back, and on the next day they reached Navan. Conachoor gave orders that the House of the Red Branch should be prepared for their honour and pleasure. Deirdre was weary, and while the rest of the company feasted she lay on a couch of deerskins and played chess with Naisi. Then Levarcham came and kissed them and warned them to bar the doors and windows. On her return, she told Conachoor that sea and mountain had spoilt the beauty of Deirdre. At first the king thought that it might not be worth while now to attack the sons of Usna, but he sent a second messenger to spy on Deirdre. This man was one whose father and brother had been slain by Naisi. He did not enter the room but squinted through a window that was open. Even so Deirdre saw him and Naisi flung an ivory chess-man and put out one of the man's eyes. Nevertheless, the messenger told Cona-

choor that he would gladly have stayed looking at Deirdre with his one eye.

The king now ordered the men of Ulster to set fire to the House of the Red Branch, and they did so. But one of the sons of Fergus made a sally through the fire and slew three hundred of his enemies and quenched the flames before he accepted the king's price of treachery. After him the other son of Fergus sallied out of the house and he slew three hundred men and was killed himself. Again the men of Ulster surrounded the house and set fire to it. Through the flames burst Ardan and Ainley and slew more men than could be counted. They returned in safety. At daybreak Naisi himself and his two brothers, with Deirdre in their midst, broke forth from the house. They slew many and scattered the survivors. They would have escaped had it not been for the spells of the king's druid, Cathbad. He worked a spell so that it seemed to the sons of Usna that they were in a sea of stormy waters. They fought against the waves, and Naisi lifted Deirdre on high. Taller towered the waves and they had to fling away their arms to save themselves. When they were near drowning, Cathbad suddenly took away the tempest and the unarmed heroes were bound and brought before Conachoor. The worst tumult of the storm had separated Deirdre from Naisi. She now spied him again and, as the spears of the guards could not keep her back without killing her, she was free to walk at his side. Nor could they then or thereafter lay hands on her lest she should kill herself. In spite of a promise to Cathbad, the king condemned the sons of Usna to death. One man only, with great difficulty, was persuaded to be the executioner, and he was a man of Norway. Each of the brothers in turn begged to be allowed to die first,

and none would give way. Then Naisi spoke, offering his own magical sword to the executioner in order that all might die at the same time. The three brothers knelt down side by side, and at one flash of the sword their heads fell together. Deirdre kissed the dead lips of Naisi and like some faithful-hearted hound she stood over the bodies so that no one dared to approach her. One by one they left her, and lastly Conachoor. At nightfall she was alone; all night no one came near her excepting the blind grave-digger. Three graves were dug and in one of them two bodies were laid. For Deirdre could not long outlive Naisi. She bent over the grave in mourning:

'The days would be long', she cried, 'without the sons of Usna. They were the hawks, the lions, the heroes, the sons of a king that was kingly.

'If they were with me, I should not miss house and fire, I should not be gloomy. But let no one think that I can live long after Naisi has died. The three hounds and the three horses of the brothers will be without masters and I could not endure to see them so. Since I first met Naisi I have not been alone until this day, though often we two were in a solitude. Him and his brothers only I loved, and for their sake I left the sweetness of Ulster and its people. Pity that I was not in the earth before they perished. My life will be short after the three brothers. Grave-digger that puttest away my darling, make not the grave too narrow—I shall be beside the noble ones.'

She was buried beside Naisi. Even in death some say that Conachoor tried to divide them. He buried them apart, but the next day they were together in the one grave. He ordered stakes of yew to be driven down through them in their separate graves, but out of these

sprang two yew trees that spread until their branches embraced on high. Conachoor prospered no more. Cathbad cursed the Palace of the Red Branch. Fergus went over to the king's enemies. The heroes were scattered. Navan dwindled and became desolate, except in the songs of the poets who sang of Deirdre; and the grass covered it.

THE PALACE OF THE MOUNTAIN ASH TREES

In one of the battles of Erin against Lochlann the strength of Finn and his sons and companions prevailed, so that Colga the king was slain, and with him fell all the men of Lochlann save Midac, youngest son of the king. Finn took Midac home to the palace of Allen, where he was entertained and educated like a king's son. When he was a man and a warrior he was enrolled among the Fena, the company of Finn. He shared their battles, their hunting, and their feasts.

Nevertheless, Midac remembered that he was the son of the King of Lochlann, whom the Fena had destroyed. Like a spy he studied the Fena's country, their strong places and palaces, their ways of fighting. So one day at Finn's council it was decided that Midac should be given land suitable to his royalty, and allowed to rule there and dwell apart. A choice of land was offered to him, and he chose the country round about the Shannon at Limerick, and the mouth of the Fergus with its islands. There was no better place than this, if in the hands of a traitor, for an invader to penetrate Erin. Finn added to this gift all that was necessary to maintain a prince, and there Midac settled and lived fourteen years without visiting the Fena, or receiving a visit from them. Finn was too generous and too full of the labours of a hero to take notice of this. He hunted and feasted without thought of Midac.

One day the Fena were hunting near Midac's country, and Finn with a few more had pitched tents on the top

of the hill. They were resting that day. The hill-top was to be a centre of rest for tired hunters, and from it men could watch the chase on the plains below. As Finn sat, now watching and now listening for hounds and hunters, a strange man saluted him. He was dressed like a warrior in a Lochlann coat of mail, and carried two spears and a long sword. He was a man of majesty and courtesy; Finn saluted him back, and for some time they talked together. More than once, the stranger put aside questions about his name and whence he had come.

'It is wonderful,' said Finn, 'that such a hero should be in Erin, but unknown to me.'

At this Conan the son of Morna interrupted and spoke hotly, saying:

'O King, this man is Midac. He is one of the Fena, but an enemy. Fourteen years he has lived yonder in the land thou gavest him, and he has never come to see us or invited us to see him.'

Midac answered mildly:

'I am one of the Fena. Is there need of invitations among brethren? I have always had ready a feast worthy of you. Come now, then, to my Palace of the Mountain Ash Trees which is not far off, and feast with me.'

Midac pointed out the way, and went on rapidly ahead to make things ready for his guests. Ossian and five chieftains were to remain at the tents until the hunt returned. Finn and the others followed Midac, promising to send back news to the tents of what should happen.

Midac disappeared at a bend in the road, but they continued after him upon the descending path for some distance. Then they took a track branching out of it

over rocks. This was very much like other tracks which they knew as hunters, and all had supposed that they were on well-known ground, when suddenly they saw the Palace of the Mountain Ash Trees. It stood up in front of them, not so much like a palace as like one of those groups of clouds in the sunset sky which resemble architecture upon enormous crags. It was huge and worthy of a great king, and it astonished them above all because they had neither seen nor heard of it before. All was silent. They hastened forward, wondering now why they had never even heard of so large a palace, and now whether it was a delusion of clouds. As they came close up to it, they saw that it stood in a copse of mountain ash trees. The scarlet berries in many places touched the walls, and a man might have thought either that the palace was deserted and the forest was closing round it, or that somehow the forest had not been disturbed either by the work of building or by the going to and fro of the inhabitants. At one side a green path led away among the trees, and then very steeply down among rocks to a broad river, at a place where there was a ford.

The palace and the copse were so silent that Finn had a thought of turning back. But one of the seven great doors was wide open, and they entered a hall more beautiful than any of them had seen before. A great fire was burning in the midst and perfuming the room without making smoke. Round about were couches strewn with soft furs. All was empty and silent. The Fena sat down upon the couches and waited in silence.

When Midac entered he said no word as he looked at them one by one. He went out without speaking and shut the great door behind him. For some time they sat waiting for his return, surprised but speechless.

Finn at last broke the silence, saying that perhaps Midac's people had made the feast at his other palace, the Palace of the Island. Then one noticed that the fire was filling the hall, not with sweetness, but with foul soot and smoke. Another pointed out that the gorgeous walls were now only rough and unsightly planks. They found themselves sitting on the cold wet ground instead of choice furs. There was now only one little door to the hall, and that fast shut.

'Break open that door,' said Finn, 'I cannot abide in a house with one door only.'

Immediately Conan started to leap to his feet; he tried to raise himself up with his spear; but he did not and could not move, whatever he did. 'A spell!' he cried out, 'A spell has rooted me to the cold ground of this Palace of the Mountain Ash Trees.' The others also tried to rise, but all were fixed to the ground like trees. Finn put his thumb into his mouth under his tooth of knowledge, where he let it stay while he was thinking. He groaned as he took it out, for he had seen the truth.

'Midac,' he said, 'has plotted against us. In the Palace of the Island a host has assembled, under many foreign kings and princes. There are Sinsar the King of the World, and his son Borba the Haughty and the three Kings of the Island of the Torrent, and many more. These three are the enchanters. The clay in which we are rooted was taken from their enchanted Island of the Torrent. Soon the host will march against us. Nothing can break the spell which binds us, except the blood of the three kings sprinkled upon the clay.'

The heroes were furious because of their helplessness. They writhed like trees in a tempest. Some wept, some

wildly lamented. Only Finn was not overcome. Instead of weeping or groaning or bellowing, he began to sing the war song of the Fena, and one by one the others gave up their lamentations and joined the song, until all were singing together. No spell could resist this song sung by a man with all his heart and soul, because it caused all other things to disappear so long as it sounded. The heroes became merely throats to sing, and ears to hear, the magnificent chant.

They were singing this song when two messengers from Ossian arrived outside the palace at nightfall to learn how they fared. One of these men, named Innsa, judged that all was well because they were singing; but Ficna the other knew that the slowness of the song meant ill. Finn heard and recognized their voices outside.

'We are spellbound here,' he told them, 'fastened to the ground by the enchantment of the three Kings of the Island of the Torrent. Beware. As for us, only their blood can deliver us. Save yourselves.'

'We will never save ourselves, except in your company,' they replied; and when he knew that they were resolved not to go away Finn told them that one good man could defend against a whole army the narrow entrance to the ford among the rocks below.

So Innsa took his stand between two rocks like pillars, while Ficna went forward to the Palace of the Island to see what he could see. But by another road one of the King of the World's chieftains came down with many knights and reached the ford. On the opposite side he saw what might have been a warrior or a tall rock, and he hailed it:

'Who is there?'

'Innsa, of Finn's household,' answered a voice.

'Lead us, then, that we may fetch the head of Finn for the King of the World.'

'You can get to Finn only over my body,' said Innsa.

Thereupon the knights rushed into the ford and began to attack Innsa with their swords. Innsa was a good warrior, and he had Finn and more than half of the Fena to defend; he stood above the enemy and their sword blades lighted him to their heads and breasts; and therefore he slew each man that approached him. The lightning and clashing of swords wakened the hawks on the rocks and reached the heroes sitting in the Palace of the Mountain Ash Trees. Innsa grew weary with reaping heads, and he leaned against one of the pillars. Then the chief himself furiously attacked him, and though the battle was long, Innsa was slain. Even so, the chief was afraid to go alone among the Fena; though fast bound by spells he dreaded them. He set out then to bring more men and to carry Innsa's head to the king. On his way Ficna encountered him.

'Whence do you come?' asked Ficna.

'From the ford of the Palace of the Mountain Ash Trees, where I have slain this champion.'

Ficna took the head and kissed it.

'Are you not then one of us?' asked the other.

'No!' cried Ficna, and fell upon him and killed him. When he had buried Innsa at the ford he carried up the enemy's head and told Finn his news.

Then Ficna returned and took Innsa's place between the rocks. Soon came the dead chief's brother to look for his friends, and he saw the bodies swelling the stream and Ficna guarding the ford. One by one the King of the World's men went up against Ficna, and he slew all that came near. Only one remained alive, and he

took back word of the slaughter. Midac was enraged. He chose a band of warriors and himself went with them to the ford.

At first Midac spoke softly to Ficna, but Ficna answered him with reproaches for his ingratitude and with defiance.

'Quit the ford!' shouted Midac.

'I am only one,' Ficna laughed; 'you are a hundred, and surely it matters not to such a band whether I go or stay.'

Midac's knights now set upon Ficna. Not one of them got near enough except to be killed, until Midac himself crept up over their bodies. They were piled so high that he was upon a level with Ficna, and the two fought until they were on the other side of the ford. The noise of sword upon sword, and sword upon mail and bone reached to the palace where other messengers, Dermat and Fatha, had arrived from Ossian.

'I hear the war cry of Ficna,' said one, 'and I hear the ravens and the glen goblins calling for his blood. Hasten.'

They ran until they came above the ford, and looked down on the pavement of dead men and the two warriors fighting. Dermat hesitated with spear in hand lest he should kill Ficna instead of Midac with so long a cast. Then he threw it. He had made no mistake; the spear had pierced Midac's body. But before Dermat could cross the ford the wounded man had raised his spear for the last and worst throw and struck down Ficna. Ficna lay dying while Dermat smote off Midac's head. Leaving Fatha to guard the ford, he ran up to the palace and shouted and struck at the door with his bloody spear. Finn anxiously forbade him to enter the place of spells.

'What,' he asked, 'was the battle at the ford?'

Dermat told him the glorious and heavy news, and Finn answered:

'Thanks, Dermat. We are spellbound and powerless. Go down and keep the ford till the sun rise and the Fena come to your help.'

Then Conan cried out:

'My hunger and thirst sitting here still are greater than I can bear. Over there in the Palace of the Island there is plenty to eat and drink. Bring me wine and meat, O Dermat.'

'This is no time, Conan,' said Dermat, 'for thinking of eating and drinking.'

'Ah, Dermat, if this were a maiden's voice now,' said Conan, 'you would not refuse. . . .'

So Dermat went down to Fatha and bade him defend the ford while he fetched meat and drink from the Palace of the Island. There he saw men deep in the feast. He slipped in and waited in a dark passage. He waylaid a cupbearer and striking off his head snatched the drinking cup. From under the king's eyes, amid a crowd of revellers, he carried off a full dish.

At the ford he found Fatha sleeping, and though he wondered at this he did not awaken him, but ran up with his burden. He threw the meat in at an opening in the wall to Conan. The drink he poured through a hole in the roof down into the dry sink of Conan's throat.

Rapidly descending he took his place beside the still sleeping Fatha. It was not long before the three Kings of the Island of the Torrent approached with their host. They greeted Dermat in a friendly manner, reminding him that they had been fellow pupils in warfare. But Dermat grasped his sword and stood upright between the rocks. The sound of the combat roused Fatha, and for one moment he set upon Dermat in anger that he

had not awakened him. Then they turned upon the enemy and fought side by side. No one went alive out of the whirling of their two swords. If one of them seemed to grow weary, lifting up his arm slowly as a mill sail rises up, he brought it down mightily as a mill sail plunges from on high. The three Kings of the Island of the Torrent could not terrify them with their dragon looks, and they slew all three. Quickly Dermat struck off their heads and bore them up to the palace.

'What news?' asked Finn.

'We have slain the kings and here are their heads,' he answered.

'Thanks and blessings, Dermat. Come, sprinkle this door with their blood.'

As Dermat sprinkled the blood the door flew open and he and Fatha ran in. They poured blood on the enchanted clay, and Finn and his companions rose up free. But they had not their old strength, nor would it return before dawn.

Once more Dermat and Fatha stood at the ford, and while it was yet only half light, Borba the Haughty came against them with a chosen band. They came straight onward until they reached the points of Dermat's and Fatha's swords. There, one by one, they stopped, tried to turn back, took half a step forward and fell down. The defenders plied their swords warily so as to outlast the night. At the point of daybreak strength returned to the warriors in the Palace. One was sent to call Ossian; the rest, led by Finn, came to the ford. Gaul the son of Morna met Borba the Haughty and slew him. The enemy no longer came up so rapidly to be killed. Some turned and fled. A messenger ran back to the King of the World.

The King of the World rode up only to see Ossian

and the returned hunters at the top of the rocks above the ford. The King of the World did not venture to cross, but spread out his men upon the opposite plain. Then all the Fena in their ranks and under their beautiful banners came across to meet them, with long lances and heavy swords, broad shields and helmets with gems. As the sun destroyed the shadows among the rocks and once more wakened the hawks, where Dermat and Fatha had been standing, so Finn and his men destroyed the army of the King of the World and sent their spirits into the air. Oscar the son of Ossian slew the king himself. Every man of the enemy who could do anything ran, and the few who escaped took to their ships and sailed away. At midday Finn and the Fena lay down and rested, and the birds gathered the scarlet berries from the mountain ash trees above the ford.

THE LAND OF YOUTH

THE last of the heroes left in Ireland was Ossian, the greatest of the warriors who were also bards. He was a son of Finn, but lived on into Patrick's time and would sit talking to the saint and even listening to him. The saint had sprinkled holy water on the hero, yet for a little while he was not sure that he ought to be talking to such a one except about Christianity, of which Ossian was too old to know anything. But two angels answered his doubts. They told him that he should write down the words of Ossian, especially his tales of the times of old, because they would give gladness to after times.

Ossian was now as gentle as any Christian. He could not ride, or run, or sing clear, but most of his time sat leaning forward on his spear, like some old apple-tree that has lost all but one of its branches and has long borne no fruit save pearls of mistletoe. He belonged to a race whose deeds and stature and way of life seemed more fitting to the earth than Christian men's, more in harmony with mountains, forests, stormy seas, and heavens. He would listen to tales of religion, but it was impossible to make him a Christian; he was altogether too old and gigantic, and his memory was too full. When Patrick or some duller priest tried to stir him by saying that Finn and his brothers and companions were not in Heaven, he replied: 'If they be not there, what should I do there? Why should I go there?' He was never tired of describing the godlike Finn.

When a priest told him that not even a midge could slip into Heaven without God's knowledge, he recalled the generosity and hospitality of Finn. If the leaves of autumn were gold, he said, and the sea waves silver, Finn would have given all away. Thousands of men could enter his hall, feast at his board, and leave without being questioned. The heroes, he said, used to speak truth and keep their promise as well as any priest. Patrick stood looking at him, his head not much above the end of the bloodstains on Ossian's spear. He would have been willing that all men should be giants if they had been as noble as the sons of Finn. He knew little men who were far more monstrous.

Whatever a priest said, Ossian was too old and mild to be often sad, except when the wind was from the east. Then the long and cold nights wearied him, and he remembered the chase and the warfare with the long-haired sons of Finn. He knew then that he could no longer hunt, or fight, or play, or swim in the torrents, that he was a poor old man without strength or music. He was left alone on the earth, and would have been glad to be with Finn his father and Oscar his son, wherever they were. It still irked him that he had not been there to aid his father in the battle when every inch of the great Finn was stretched cold and still beside the Boyne. Nor did he share the last battle of the Fena, when Oscar slew Cairbre and died himself, and only the swift-footed one of the tribe escaped. It was his own fault that Ossian had missed these battles. Strange it was that such an adventure of youth should have been the means of drawing out his life to so great an age! He told Patrick the tale.

On a misty spring morning Finn and the Fena, and Ossian among them, were hunting among the Lakes of

Killarney. They were in full chase when they were suddenly aware of a single rider galloping on a white horse towards them. The stag and the hounds ran on, but all men stopped to see the beautiful woman riding out of the West. She reined in the horse a little way from the motionless hunters. Her eyes had the blue of the dewdrop reflecting a cloudless sky; her cheeks were crimsoned white like snow at dawn; her curled golden hair concealed the diadem and rings of gold which were meant to adorn it. She wore a mantle of brown precious silk, golden-starred and clasped with a brooch of gold, flowing down over the red-golden saddle and the white horsecloth to the gold hooves and the green grass. She was slender and her white hand small, yet she rode the galloper with more grace than the swans rode the water. 'I have ridden,' she said, 'from a far country.'

Finn asked her name and country, and she said she was Niav of the Golden Hair, daughter of the King of Tirnanoge, beyond the west sea. She had come because she could love no other man but the high-spirited and famous Ossian, son of Finn. When Ossian heard her pronounce his name he loved her. As she governed the great horse with her little hand, so she governed him from that time with a sweet voice that sounded strangely among the company of hunters. Whatever her voice said he was bound to love Niav, but presently she began to utter things that might have made the voice of the jay seem sweet. For when Ossian had spoken his love and given her a true gentle welcome to his country, she said:

'Thou must come with me on my horse to Tirnanoge, the Land of Youth. It is the loveliest and most famous country under the sun. Leaf, blossom and fruit cover the trees at one time and for ever. Gold, silver and

all that delights the eyes, abound there. It flows with wine and honey. Thou shalt have there a hundred swiftest steeds, a hundred perfect hounds. Thou shalt have a coat of impenetrable mail and a sword that cannot be resisted or escaped. Thou shalt have jewels not of this world. Thy herds shall be without number. Thy flocks shall have golden fleeces. Each day shall be one of feasting and harp-playing. A hundred warriors in full armour and a hundred harpers with sweetest music shall be at thy call. Thou shalt wear the diadem of the king of Tirnanoge, which no other but he ever wore, and it shall preserve thee from all perils of day and night. Thou shalt have beauty and strength everlastingly. Decline shall never come to thee, and thou shalt not know decay or death, and I shall be thy wife in Tirnanoge.'

Finn and the Fena burst out into lamentation when they saw Ossian turning towards that maiden and towards the West. Finn took his hand and said:

'Alas, my son, thou art going away, and I fear thou wilt not return.'

Though Ossian said: 'After a little I will come back to see thee,' his father did not stop weeping as they embraced, nor yet when he mounted the white horse behind Niav. They galloped away westward, smoothly and swiftly to the sea-shore. They spoke not a word, because Niav had said, 'Let us be silent until we reach the sea.' The only sound was the mourning of Finn and the Fena.

Shaking himself and neighing three times as he touched the water, the horse raced forward as if the waves had been grass. He was swifter than a March wind on the mountain-tops. Now on this hand and now on that the riders saw strange coasts of islands

and continents, with cities and white palaces and strong places shining on the green land above the water. They were far out beyond the course of ships, but once a hornless fawn tripped beside them, running before a white hound with red ears; and they saw a lovely maiden, on a brown steed, carrying a golden apple, and following her a young warrior on a white steed, clad in a mantle of crimson satin, and bearing a golden-hilted sword. Ossian asked who were the riders.

'There is nothing in these things,' said Niav, 'they are nothing compared with the marvels of Tirnanoge.'

They rode on until they saw in the farthest distance a sunny palace above the waves, and Ossian asked whose palace it was and who was the prince.

'It is the Land of Virtues,' said Niav, 'ruled over by the giant Fomor. His queen is the daughter of the King of the Land of Life. He carried her away by force and keeps her by force in the palace, where she waits for a champion to fight the giant. No man has been found of great enough courage.'

'I,' said Ossian, 'will be her champion and rescue the Queen.'

The beautiful young queen welcomed them and gave them chairs of gold, choice food, golden goblets of wine and mead; and Ossian promised to be her champion, to kill the giant or to be killed in the attempt. The giant approached, ugly and huge, bearing a great bar of iron for a club, and without bowing or saluting, offered to fight Ossian. For three days they fought; and Niav and the Queen stood by weeping. At last Ossian struck down the giant, and as he lay smote off his head. For a minute there seemed two giants instead of one, the gnarled head rolling its eyes and thrusting its tongue between its fangs, and the mountainous heav-

ing body. Niav and the Queen raised a cry of joy at the sight. They led Ossian into the palace and washed and healed his wounds, and when he was restored he covered up the hideousness of Fomor under a cairn.

'It was a lovely land,' said Ossian to Patrick, 'and if Heaven hath equal glories I should praise your God.'

Nevertheless the lovers parted from the Queen, who was as sorry for their going as she was glad of her release. They rode on towards Tirnanoge. Once more their course was over the sea. They saw the hound following the fawn, and the young warrior after the maiden carrying the golden apple. A storm arose, but not foam above or waves beneath troubled their course. In the brightness of lightning and in the after blackness they rode on happily and as quiet as the fish at the bottom of the deep. When the sun conquered they saw before them a land of flowers and long lawns, lakes and rivers shining, with chains of cataracts and high blue hills. Between the strand of gold and the hills rose a palace adorned with carving and overlaid with gold and many-coloured stones, and Niav said:

'This is Tirnanoge.'

A company of warriors came down from the Palace to meet them. After them followed the King of Tirnanoge in a crown of diamonds and gold and a garment of bright gold, and with him the queen and her maidens, and a host glittering with arms and armour and sounding with the music of harps, and in the intervals the blowing of trumpets. The king took Ossian's hand and welcomed him before the host and led him into the palace. There they feasted for ten days and celebrated the marriage of Ossian and Niav.

Tirnanoge was as beautiful and happy as Niav had said. Her words, indeed, even with the accompaniment

of her lovely voice, falling on a lover's ears, had represented the beauty and happiness of the country only as words can do to those who have not seen what they describe. It was more pleasant to Ossian to enjoy than it was afterwards bitter to remember. So many were its pleasures that when he recalled his life there a hundred things were forgotten, and yet it seemed impossible. For Tirnanoge had made young his soul and body. The battles of old which he had fought in Ireland, the wounds, the weariness, the anxiety, the mourning, no longer helped to stiffen his limbs and weigh down his heart. He rose up in the morning glad and he lay down at night content. He was never tired of doing pleasant things many times over. Each present hour was as happy to him as the long-past hour seems to men who have never been in Tirnanoge. Seldom did the old days in Ireland return to his mind. When they did he saw the heroes and their fights, all as beautiful and quiet as the pictures upon the walls. Thus he saw the mild, wise, generous Finn his father in many acts of his life, but above all on the day when he struck his dog Bran. The noble dog looked at him in wonder, and as Finn stooped to make up for the blow by a caress, he wished that the arm had been torn from his shoulder before it had offended. He saw the sweet-tongued bard, his uncle Fergus; his own mighty son Oscar, who won back a lost battle with a tree trunk for weapon; the one-eyed Gaul; the beautiful, chivalrous Dermat. He saw them in chase and battle, always triumphing by their truth-telling and the might of their hands. He recalled the trial-days for men seeking to join the ranks of the Fena. The candidate was bound never to refuse hospitality, never to insult a woman, to take no dowry with his wife. Having promised these things, he was tested for strength and

courage. He had to stand in a pit exposed from the knees upward, and with only a shield and a hazel wand to turn aside the spears hurled at him by nine warriors together. Also he was given a short start and had to race through the forest before armed men: he could shelter himself only by tree trunks, but if wounded or caught—if even he had broken a branch in his course or unbraided his hair, or if his weapons at the end trembled in his hands—he could not become one of the Fena. He had to run at full speed and without slackening pluck a thorn out of his heel, jump a branch as high as himself, and stoop under one no higher than his knee.

His memory showed him these things, and they were curious and amusing. He did not know that they were memories. They belonged to a life so unlike that of Tirnanoge, that he saw them without knowing that he himself had once hunted with those hunters and warred beside those warriors. He laughed at some of them as at outlandish scenes. The life of Tirnanoge was all beautiful, being of a kind that men have always refused to think possible, because it was active and full of variety yet never brought death or decay, weariness or regret. This cannot easily be imagined by earthly men. They say that perfect happiness would be dull if it were possible. If they could imagine it, they would not love it so utterly when they possessed it like Ossian; many would refuse it because it wipes out the desire and the conscious memory of earth. The men of Tirnanoge remember earth without knowing what it is they are remembering, just as in dreams we may recall what we did not know had ever happened to us.

For hundreds of years Ossian lived with Niav in this forgetfulness. They had three children, two sons and a daughter, and they called the sons Finn and Oscar.

But one day as he was hunting he saw an eagle. He closed his eyes and he saw the bird still, but in a different scene. It floated above a mountain that ended in a red precipice and a lake below. He saw not one lake but several, one beyond the other, among the mountains, and upon one a swan floated. Instantly the swan made him think of Niav. In this there was nothing strange. But he thought of her not as she was then, but as she was when he first saw her riding in Killarney, and he saw with equal clearness the warriors bidding him farewell as they had done three hundred years ago. This was memory, and Ossian knew it. Very old and rude and shaggy they looked, like a clump of trees upon a hill-top, and he longed to ride straight away to Killarney. But his heart was troubled. He felt that he could not trust his horse to run upon the waters, so he rode home to Niav and told her and the king that he wished to visit Ireland. They said they would not stop him, but Niav said:

'I fear, Ossian, thou wilt not come back again, once thou hast returned to Ireland. Ireland is not what it was. Finn and the Fena are there no more. Saints and priests are in their places. Yet I fear thou wilt not come back. Thou must not touch the soil of Ireland with thy feet. Thou never canst come back if thou dismount from the white horse and touch Irish earth. Never canst thou see me or I see thee again if thou forget this.'

Ossian wept but he rode away towards Ireland, passing again the islands and continents and cities and palaces. When he reached Ireland he seemed to see nothing that he knew. The smell was the same, some of the distant mountains also. But the Fena were not there. He saw what looked like men far off, but having ridden up to

them he saw that they were not; for they reached only to the gold clasp in his instep. They were kind and courteous and they spoke Irish, but they looked up and wondered. He questioned them about Finn and Oscar and the rest.

'We have heard of Finn,' they said. 'He was a wise and generous king in Ireland once upon a time. The poets tell of him and his companions. There were great men in those days and the Fena were great amongst them. The poets sing of them. Finn, they say, is dead long ago, and his brothers and sons and grandsons and companions are all dead. They were great men, heroes taller than we, every one of them as tall as yourself, but they are all dead of their wounds. All except one, as the poets say. He was one of the sons of Finn named Ossian. He left his father and all that company to go with a maiden to Tirnanoge. He said that he would come back, but he never did. They sought him, but before they could find him they were dead. But for the poets they would be forgotten. . . .'

'Poets?' said Ossian, in sorrow and in anger. 'What poets can there be if Fergus be dead and Ossian in Tirnanoge?'

His heart was too heavy to be long angry with these little images of men. He turned away his horse and rode on to the well-known places of battle and hunt and feast. Finn's palace was the home of winds and birds above, of chickweeds and nettles below. The cooking places of the Fena still scarred the high moors, but the heroes were gone. No men had seen them. They could only show him writings containing the names of Finn, Ossian, Fergus, Oscar, Gaul, Dermat, and the rest. Wherever he went he heard about these poems instead of the champions. Men stared at him, but none

guessed he was Ossian, one of the Fena. Hither and thither he rode visiting all the scenes of the Fena's exploits. But he saw only the little creatures made in the image of men. He felt very pitiful towards them.

One day in the Glen of Thrushes he saw a cluster of these men trying to lift up a huge stone. They were three hundred, but they could neither raise it to its place nor get free from underneath it, and they said:

'O kingly champion, help us.'

So Ossian stretched himself forward upon his horse's neck and stooped and gripped the stone in one hand. All the little men ran out from underneath like lizards disturbed. Then Ossian put forth his strength. He raised the stone above his head and threw it. It covered the multitude like a high roof as it flew. But he had burst the saddle girth of his horse with the effort; the saddle slipped and he could not recover himself; and his feet touched the earth. The white horse vanished away. Now came altogether the change and decay that could not befall him in Tirnanoge; his strength ebbed away fast, and he sank sighing down like a wave; he became the old, frail, mighty one who leaned on his spear and would listen to Patrick talking about Heaven, and would talk to him of Niav and of Tirnanoge, the Land of Youth.

BRAN AND BRONWEN

THE King of the Island of the Mighty, Bran the son of Lear, had his court at Harlech, and one day he sat upon the rock of Harlech, looking over the sea. With him were his brothers, Manawythan, and Nissyen the peaceful and Evnissyen the quarrelsome, and a company of nobles worthy of a king. While they sat, they saw ships coming over the sea from Ireland. They were thirteen ships, and the wind carried them rapidly towards Harlech. As they drew near the first of them showed a signal of peace, a shield lifted up with the point upwards above the side of the ship, and they sent men to the land. They saluted Bran from the shore, and he saluted them back again. Sitting on the rock he asked them the name of their lord, and why he came, and whether he would land.

'We are from Matholwch the King of Ireland,' they said; 'he comes to ask Bronwen the daughter of Lear to be his wife.'

Matholwch landed and Bran received him with honour and joy. Next day they held a council and it was decided that Bronwen should marry the King of Ireland. They went for the marriage feast to Aberfrow, Matholwch and the Irish sailing round the coast, Bran and his court riding on the cliffs above. Bran and Bronwen and the other children of Lear, and Matholwch and the nobles of the two kings, feasted at Aberfrow. No house was roomy enough for Bran, so they feasted in a tent with a roof like the sky; and when it seemed pleasanter to sleep than to carouse they went to rest.

But Evnissyen was angry because Bronwen had been given to Matholwch without his consent. 'There could be no greater insult,' he said, and in his anger he hacked and hewed with his sword among the horses of the Irish. When Matholwch heard that his horses had been mutilated he took it as an insult. His attendants said: 'It was an insult and it was meant for an insult.' To him it was marvellous that they should insult him after giving him Bronwen for a wife, but he went down towards his fleet with indignation. Bran, hearing of his going, sent after him, and the messengers asked Matholwch the cause of this haste. When they heard it, they said: 'This was not done with the knowledge of the king. The dishonour is greater to Bran than to thee.' Matholwch replied: 'But he cannot recall the insult.'

The messengers hastened back to tell Bran. In a little time he sent others to offer a sound horse for each mutilated one, a staff of silver as large and tall as Matholwch himself, and an unbounded apology. Matholwch and his council accepted this and returned to the court.

They sat down again to feast, Bran and Matholwch and their companies. Matholwch seemed not so cheerful as before to Bran, who thought this might be because of the small atonement for the insult. 'O man,' said Bran, 'thou dost not discourse to-night so cheerfully as thou wast wont. And if it be because of the smallness of the atonement, thou shalt add thereunto whatsoever thou mayst choose, and to-morrow I will pay thee the horses.'

'Lord,' said he, 'Heaven reward thee.'

'And I will increase the atonement,' said Bran, 'for I will give unto thee a cauldron, the property of which

is, that if one of thy men be slain to-day, and be cast therein, to-morrow he will be as well as ever he was at the best, except that he will not regain his speech.' And thereupon Matholwch gave him great thanks, and very joyful was he for that cause.

In the morning they gave Matholwch his horses.

When Bran and Matholwch again sat together, the King of Ireland asked where the cauldron had come from. 'I had it,' said Bran, 'from Llassar Llaesgyvnewid and his wife, who came hither after escaping from the red-hot Iron House in Ireland. It is strange that thou shouldst know nothing of this.' 'But,' said Matholwch: 'I do know. I was hunting in Ireland beside the Lake of the Cauldron, when I saw a yellow-haired man, hideous and huge, coming out of the lake with a cauldron upon his back. After him came a woman of twice his bulk. They greeted me, and because the woman was before long to be delivered of a child I took them back with me and maintained them. But they were a terror to my people, with their violence, and either they must go or I must lose my kingdom. They would not go of their own free will and could not be driven out. So a chamber of iron was built. Coals were heaped high all round it. Llassar and his wife were served with plenty of meat and drink, and when they were very full they were thrust into the chamber and shut in. The coal was set on fire. When the walls were red hot they held a council in the middle of the floor. They waited until the iron was white hot: then Llassar burst through the wall and his wife followed him out. Thus they came over unto thee. How didst thou receive them?'

'Their offspring are now scattered all over my country. They prosper everywhere and fortify their abodes with men and arms of the best that were ever seen.'

At the end of the days of feasting, Matholwch went back to Ireland with Bronwen and the silver staff and the cauldron. Men in Ireland were glad of their coming, and Bronwen gave them many great gifts. But the story of the insult to Matholwch rankled in men's hearts. Bronwen bore him a son who was called Gwern, but they would not let Matholwch forget the story. At last they drove Bronwen into the kitchen to be a cook, and made the butcher give her every day a blow on the ear for punishment. For three years also, by their persuasion, Matholwch forbade all trade with Wales and ordered all who came over from Wales to be imprisoned.

In her kitchen Bronwen reared a starling secretly. She taught the starling to speak; she taught it what Bran her brother was like. Then she wrote a letter telling her woes and fastened it under the bird's wing, and sent it towards the Island of the Mighty.

One day, as Bran was at council, the starling lighted upon his shoulder and ruffled its feathers so that the letter was seen, and men knew that the bird had been trained. Bran read the letter with great sorrow at the pitiful news of Bronwen. He sent messengers to all parts of the island to summon a full council. He told them the story of Bronwen's suffering and they resolved to go to Ireland, leaving in charge of the land Caradoc the son of Bran, and six other chief men and their seven knights, and the young page Pendaran.

When the fleet came to shallow water Bran stepped overboard and strode among the ships towards Ireland. The swineherds of Matholwch saw him. 'Lord,' said they, hurrying to their master, 'we have marvellous news. We have seen a forest upon the sea, and a hill beside it, and these things are moving.' Matholwch knew nothing of this, and, 'Verily,' he said, 'only Bronwen might

know.' Messengers were sent to her, telling her what they had seen. 'What is the forest upon the sea?' they asked. 'It is the ships of the Island of the Mighty,' she said. 'And what is that hill amongst them?' they asked. 'It is Bran, my brother,' she answered; 'he is walking in the shallow water where no ship could carry him.'

Matholwch and the warriors and chief men of Ireland took hasty counsel. They fled over a river, breaking down the bridge behind them. The invaders could not follow until Bran himself lay across the river for them to go over. 'He who will be chief,' he said, 'let him be a bridge also.' When they saw this, the enemy knew that it was useless to fly from Bran. They sent messengers to him, pleading, 'Matholwch has given the Kingdom of Ireland to Gwern, thy sister's son. Let this atone for the insult to Bronwen. As to Matholwch, he will dwell wherever thou choosest, here or in the Island of the Mighty.' Bran said, 'Shall I not have the kingdom myself?' The messengers hurried back to Matholwch, and implored him to send a more agreeable message to Bran.

Matholwch consulted his friends.

'My friends,' said Matholwch, 'what may be your counsel?' 'Lord,' said they, 'there is no other counsel than this alone. Bran was never known to be within a house; make, therefore, a house that will hold him and the men of the Island of the Mighty on the one side, and thyself and thy host on the other; and give over thy kingdom to his will, and do him homage. So by reason of the honour thou doest him in making him a house, whereas he never before had a house to hold him, he will make peace with thee.' So the messengers went back to Bran, bearing this message.

Bran accepted the offer, for Bronwen had pleaded with him, in fear lest he should lay waste the country.

The great house for Bran was built as if to last for ever. But the Irish were very crafty. They put brackets on each side of the hundred pillars in the house, and placed a leathern bag on each of them, and in each bag a warrior. Then Evnissyen came in before the host of the Island of the Mighty. He scanned the house with fierce and savage looks, and caught sight of the leathern bags around the pillars. 'What is in this bag?' asked he of one of the Irish. 'Meal, good soul,' said the man. And Evnissyen felt about it until he came to the warrior's head, and he squeezed the head until he felt his fingers meet together in the brain through the bone. And he left that one, and put his hand upon another, and asked what was therein. 'Meal,' said the Irishman. So he did the same to every one of them, until he had left alive, of all the two hundred men, only one; and coming to this last one, he asked what was there. 'Meal, good soul,' said the Irishman. And he felt about until he felt the head, and he squeezed that head as he had done the others; and though he found that the head of this one was armed, he left him not until he had killed him.

So the two hosts entered the house, the men of Ireland on one side and the men of the Island of the Mighty on the other. They sat down in peace, and Gwern the son of Bronwen was crowned King of Ireland. Thus the peace was confirmed. Then Bran called the boy to him, and he came, and his uncle kissed him. Manawythan called him and kissed him, and so did Nissyen. To each of them the boy ran up lovingly. 'Why does my nephew not come to me?' said Evnissyen, 'though he were not King of Ireland I would kiss him gladly.'

Bran turned to the boy and said, 'He will go to thee gladly,' and so he did. Evnissyen said to himself, 'They do not dream of the slaughter I will now commit,' and he took up Gwern by the feet and threw him head-first into the fire. Bronwen tried to leap after her child, but Bran prevented her. The house was all in tumult. The two hosts armed themselves, and each man saw an enemy. Said Morthwyt Tyllion: 'The gadflies of Morthwyt Tyllion's cow!' Only Bran was calm amid the fury of the battle, supporting Bronwen between his shield and his shoulder.

At first the Irish were worsted because they had no help from the leathern bags on the brackets; but they kindled a fire in Llassar's cauldron and cast into it all their dead. Out of this the dead leapt up alive. These men who were restored fought as well as ever, but they could not speak. When Evnissyen saw the Irish triumphing with this advantage, but the men of the Island of the Mighty lying dead and remaining dead, he said in his heart, 'Alas! woe is me, that I should have been the cause of bringing the men of the Island of the Mighty into so great a strait. Evil betide me if I do not deliver them.' And he cast himself among the dead bodies of the Irish, and two unshod Irishmen came to him, and taking him to be one of the Irish flung him into the cauldron. And he stretched himself out in the cauldron, so that he rent the cauldron into four pieces and burst his own heart also. Nevertheless the men of the Island of the Mighty could not gain the victory. Besides Bran and Bronwen, only Manawythan and Taliesin the bard and five others escaped. Bran himself was wounded in the foot with a poisoned dart.

When they had gone aboard, Bran called these men round him and said:

'I am at the point of death. Cut off my head, and take it and bear it to the White Mount in London, and bury it there with the face towards France. A long time will you be upon the road. In Harlech you will be feasting seven years, the birds of Rhiannon singing unto you the while. And all that time the head will be to you as pleasant company as it ever was when on my body. And at Gwales Island you will be fourscore years, and you may remain there, and the head with you uncorrupted, until you open the door that looks towards Aber Henvelen and towards Cornwall. And after you have opened that door, there you may no longer tarry; set forth then to London to bury the head, and go straight forward.'

They cut off his head and bore it carefully with them. When they had landed in Anglesey they sat down to rest. Bronwen looked sadly round her. She looked towards Ireland and the Island of the Mighty and cried, 'Alas! woe is me that I was ever born; two islands have been destroyed because of me.' She uttered a loud groan, and there broke her heart. They buried her beside the river Alaw, at the place now called Bronwen's Island.

As they journeyed towards Harlech a multitude met them.

'Have you any tidings?' asked Manawythan, the son of Lear.

'Caswallawn, the son of Beli, has conquered the Island of the Mighty,' they answered, 'and is crowned King in London. He has slain the guardians of the kingdom, except Caradoc, and his heart broke for grief; for he could see the sword slaying his companions, but he could not see the slayer. Pendaran, the young page, has run away into the woods.'

They went on to Harlech, and there stayed to rest. As they sat eating and drinking, the three birds of Rhiannon flitted up to the darkness of the rafters and began singing. All other songs were unpleasant compared to theirs. The birds seemed to be very far away, as it were across a wide sea, yet their notes were distinct. They were seven years sitting at this repast and listening to the birds of Rhiannon, and the seven years were no longer than a summer's day.

At the end of the seventh year they travelled to the bird island of Gwales, off Pembrokeshire. They found a fair and royal site overlooking the sea, and upon it a spacious hall. Into this hall they went, and two of its doors were open, but the third, which looked towards Cornwall, was closed. 'That,' said Manawythan, pointing, 'is the door we may not open.' That night they feasted and were glad. They remembered nothing of the past, nothing they had seen or done, nothing either joyous or sorrowful. And so they remained for fourscore years, so happy that they never thought whether they were happy or not. They never wearied, nor did they ever know or think how time was passing. The head of Bran was as pleasant to them as if he himself had been in their company, and these fourscore years were called 'The Entertaining of the Noble Head'.

One day Heilyn, the son of Gwynn, said: 'Ill luck to me if I do not open the door to know if that is true which Bran said of it.' He opened the door and they looked out towards Cornwall and Aber Henvelen. As they looked they remembered all things, their misery and losses, just as they had happened and as freshly as if those eighty years had never been; and especially they remembered the death of Bran. They could rest no longer. They journeyed to London and buried the

head of Bran in the White Mount with its face towards France; and Manawythan was sad, and gazing upon the town of London he sighed and exclaimed: 'There is none save myself without a resting-place this night.'

This was called the first goodly concealment, when Bran's head was buried. While the head was concealed no invader could enter the Island of the Mighty. The second concealment was that of the bones of Gwrthevyr, which were hid in the chief harbour of the Island: the third was when Lud the son of Beli buried the dragons in the City of Pharaon among the rocks of Snowdon. There were three unhappy uncoverings of these hidden things. Vortigern uncovered the dragons and the bones of Gwrthevyr. King Arthur uncovered the buried head of Bran because he was proud and was unwilling to keep out invaders save by his own strength. After these three uncoverings followed the chief invasions of the Island of the Mighty.

KILHUGH AND OLWEN

PART I

KILHUGH was the son of Kilyth, son of Prince Kelython. For a long time before he was born his mother was wandering to and fro alone in solitudes and wildernesses, and a mountain was his birthplace. Soon afterwards his mother fell sick, and in a little while she died. When the boy was big his father married another woman, a widowed queen.

'It were well for thee, Kilhugh, to have a wife,' said his stepmother one day, 'and I have a daughter who is coveted by all the warriors and princes of the world.'

'But I am not of an age yet to marry,' answered Kilhugh.

Then the woman flared into anger, and when she had spent her words she said to the lad in a quiet voice:

'Thou shalt not have a wife until thou obtain Olwen, the daughter of the giant, Uspathadden Penkower.'

At the sound of the name of Olwen, though uttered in hatred, Kilhugh blushed for love. Men and women in his father's castle saw a change in his face, and heard it in his voice. 'What has come over thee, my son?' asked his father, and Kilhugh told him. 'It will be easy for thee to win Olwen,' he said, 'for King Arthur is thy cousin. Go, therefore, and seek the boon of him; but first ask him to honour thee by cutting thy hair.'

Kilhugh rode away upon a dappled grey horse, whose bridle and saddle were of gold. His shoes and stirrups also were heavy with gold. Yet his horse did not bow the grass underfoot. His sword had a golden hilt, his war horn was ivory. He carried two spears of silver, three ells long, and steel-headed; so sharp were the spears that they would draw blood from the wind, and they were swifter than the fall of the dewdrop from the blade of reed-grass upon the earth when the dew of June is at the heaviest. A greyhound with a collar of rubies ran on either side of him, sporting like sea swallows and continually crossing over in front of the horse as Kilhugh journeyed towards Arthur's palace.

The door of the hall was shut, and the porter would not open it.

'The knife is in the meat,' he said, 'and the drink is in the horn, and none may enter but the son of a king of a privileged country, or a craftsman bringing his craft. But the guest-chamber is free to thee, and thou wilt fare as well there as in Arthur's hall, and to-morrow when the hall gate is opened thou shalt enter.'

'That will I not do,' said Kilhugh, lifting up his voice, 'and if thou dost not open the gate I will give three fatal shouts—where my shout is heard, no child will be born.'

'Against the laws of the palace thou shalt not enter,' said the porter. Nevertheless, he went hastily into the hall and spoke to Arthur:

'Half of my life is past. I have been in India, in Africa, in Greece, in the East, in the islands, in Sach and Salach, in Lotor and Fotor, in Caer Oeth and Annoeth, and in Caer Nevenhyr. I have seen heroes and kings. But never did I behold one of majesty like the man yonder at the gate.'

Arthur made a quick reply:

'If walking thou didst come here, go back running. Bid him enter out of the wind and rain. Let all of you honour him and serve him.'

The gate was opened, and Kilhugh entered upon horseback into the hall. He greeted Arthur and the chiefs and warriors, and they greeted him back.

'Sit thou between two of my warriors,' said Arthur, 'thou shalt have minstrels before thee and shalt enjoy the privileges of a king born to a throne.'

'I came not for meat and drink,' said Kilhugh, 'but for a boon. If I obtain it I will repay and praise thee; if not, I will carry thy dispraise to the four quarters of the earth.'

'Whatever thou ask shall be thine,' said Arthur, 'save my ship, my mantle, my sword, my lance, my shield, my dagger, and my wife.'

'I would,' said Kilhugh, 'that thou bless my hair.'

So Arthur combed Kilhugh's hair, and asked his name and family. When he heard that the youth was his own cousin he promised him any boon.

'Olwen is the boon I desire,' said Kilhugh, 'I crave it of thee, lord Arthur. I crave it of thy warriors, Kay and Bedwyr and Gwynn and Gormant, and Taliesin the bard, and Geraint, and Morvran the hideous, and Santhe Bryd Angel the beautiful, and Osla whose dagger was once a bridge for an army, and Drem who can see the gnats of Cornwall from Caithness, and Ughtryd who spread his red untrimmed beard over the eight and forty rafters of thy hall, and Ol who tracked his father's swine that were carried off seven years before he was born, and all the other warriors and huntsmen, and Bedwini the Bishop who blesses thy meat and drink. I crave it also of the golden-chained daughters of this island, Guinevere thy queen and Guiniach her sister, and

Gwen and Eurolwen and Teleri and Morvyth and Gwenllian and Creithylad and the two Essyllts.'

'Kilhugh,' said Arthur, 'I have never heard of Olwen until this day, but I will send men to search. Give me time.'

Kilhugh granted him until the last night of the year, but the messengers returned on that day as ignorant as they set out.

'Everyone has his boon,' exclaimed Kilhugh that night, 'only I lack mine.'

'Dost thou reproach Arthur?' Kay asked. 'Come with us and we will not part until we obtain the maiden or thou dost confess that she does not exist.'

Kay had many strange powers. He could make himself as tall as the highest tree in the forest. So great was the heat of his nature that when his friends were cold it was like fuel to light the fire. His sword gave wounds that could not be healed. And Kay rose up to accompany Kilhugh.

Arthur called also Bedwyr, the swiftest man in the island except Drych Ail Kibthar and the king himself; and Cynthelig the guide who was as good a guide in a new land as in his own; and Gwrhyr who knew all tongues of men and birds and beasts; and his nephew Gwalchmai who never returned home before a quest was achieved; and Menw who could weave charms and illusions and make men invisible. They journeyed with Kilhugh until they came to a vast open plain and saw upon it a great castle, the fairest of the castles of the world. Though they rode all day for three days they did not reach this castle. When at last they were approaching it they saw a flock of sheep sufficient to have covered the sky in summer, and on a mound sat the herdsman and his dog, a mastiff larger than a horse.

Never had that herdsman lost a lamb out of his flock. Gwrhyr was sent to salute him and Menw to cast a spell upon the dog. They greeted the man and asked him who lived in the castle.

'This,' he answered, 'is known through the world as the Castle of Uspathadden Penkower'.

'And who art thou?'

'My name is Custennin and I am oppressed by my brother Uspathadden on account of my possessions. Who are ye?'

'We are an embassy from Arthur, seeking Olwen the daughter of Uspathadden.'

'The mercy of Heaven be upon you,' cried Custennin. 'None ever returned from that quest,' and he led them to his own house.

When they had eaten and were going out again to play a little before the trouble, Custennin's wife opened a stone chest in her chimney corner and let out a youth with curled yellow hair.

'Three and twenty of my sons,' she said, 'has Uspathadden slain, and I have no more hope of this one than of the others.'

He was a goodly young man, and Kay asked her if he might join their quest. Like her husband she implored them to turn back when she heard their errand. But when she saw that they were not to be frightened, she confessed that Olwen herself was in the habit of coming to that herdsman's dwelling to wash her hair. They gave a pledge not to harm the maid, and the woman consented to send for her to come that day. She entered, and before he had recovered from the astonishment of her light-footed beauty, Kilhugh found her sitting next to him upon his bench. The name Olwen came into his soul at the first sight of her, and he knew her.

'Thou art she', said Kilhugh, 'whom I have loved. Come away with me.'

'I cannot,' Olwen said, 'for I have promised my father not to go without his counsel, for his life will last only until the day of my marriage. But go, ask my father for me. Whatever he shall ask of thee grant him, and thou shalt obtain me.'

Then she rose up and walked before them to the castle. Kilhugh and his companions slew the nine porters at the nine gates in silence, and the nine watch-dogs without a bark. They entered the hall and greeted Uspathadden as he sat there like a strange crag beheld suddenly at a sharp turn in a road among the mountains when night is falling.

'The greeting of Heaven and of man to thee, Uspathadden Penkower,' they said.

'Why are you here?' he asked.

'To seek thy daughter Olwen as a wife for Kilhugh.'

'Raise up my eyebrows,' said Uspathadden to his pages and attendants, 'that I may see this son-in-law.'

They raised his eyebrows from over his eyes with forks, and he said:

'Come to-morrow for an answer.'

As they were going, he seized a poisoned dart and threw it after them. But Bedwyr caught it and flung it back, piercing Uspathadden's knee and making him say:

'A cursed ungentle son-in-law, truly. I shall limp for this. The poisoned iron stings like a gadfly. Cursed be the smith who forged it and the anvil where it was wrought.'

Next day at dawn Kilhugh and the others went again to the castle and asked for Olwen. But said Uspathadden:

'Her four great-grandmothers and four great-grandsires are yet alive and I must take counsel of them.'

They turned to leave him and he threw a second dart. Menw flung it back and it pierced his breast and came out of the small of his back.

'A cursed ungentle son-in-law, truly,' growled Uspathadden. 'This iron bites like a horse-leech. Whenever I go up hill I shall pant and have a pain in my chest, and I shall often loathe my food.'

He was cursing the smith and the anvil as Kilhugh went out to meat.

On the third day he said to them as soon as they entered:

'Shoot not at me unless you desire death. Where are my attendants? Lift up my eyebrows which have fallen over my eyeballs, that I may see the fashion of my son-in-law.' Then they arose, and, as they did so, Uspathadden Penkower took the third poisoned dart and cast it at them. And Kilhugh caught it and threw it vigorously, and wounded him through the eyeball, so that the dart came out at the back of his head.

'A cursed ungentle son-in-law, truly! Now as long as I remain alive, my eyesight will be the worse. Whenever I go against the wind, my eyes will water; and peradventure my head will burn, and I shall have a giddiness every new moon. Cursed be the fire in which it was forged. Like the bite of a mad dog is the stroke of this poisoned iron.'

And they went to meat.

The next day Kilhugh said to Uspathadden:

'Shoot at us no more, unless thou art still starving with hunger for wounds and torment such as thou hast already. Give me thy daughter. If not, thou shalt die for refusing her.'

The giant answered:

'Come hither that I may see thee,' and he placed a chair at his feet so that Kilhugh could gaze up under the overhanging eyebrows and exchange glances with the one small dodging brown eye which remained to him.

'Is it thou that seekest my daughter?'

'It is I.'

'I must have thy pledge that thou wilt be just in dealing with me. When I have got what I am going to ask for, thou shalt have my daughter.'

'Willingly I promise. Name what thou dost desire, Uspathadden Penkower.'

Still looking down, he said to Kilhugh:

'Seest thou yonder red ploughland?'

'I see it.'

'When first I met the mother of this maiden, nine bushels of flax were sown therein, and none has yet sprung up, neither white nor black; and I have the measure by me still. I require to have the flax to sow in the new land yonder, that when it grows up it may make a white wimple for my daughter's head, on the day of thy wedding.'

Kilhugh looked out through the door of the hall to the red land on the hill-side below the rocks, and said:

'It will be easy for me to do this.'

'If thou canst do this, there is something else thou canst not do which I require. For thy wedding I must shave this beard,'—Kilhugh looked up at what seemed bushes of dry gorse growing on the ledge of the giant's chin—'and to shave it I must have the tusk of Yskithyrwyn Penbaeth, the boar, and the tusk has to be drawn out of his jaw while he is alive.'

'It will be easy for me to do this.'

'Supposing thou canst do it, there is something yet

which thou canst not do,' said Uspathadden, shaking the tangled thickets of his grey-sprinkled black hair, which the magpies visited to gather lining for their nests. 'I must trim my hair. Throughout the world there is not a comb or scissors with which I can arrange my hair on account of its rankness, except the comb and scissors that are between the two ears of Turk Truith, the son of Prince Tared. He will not give them of his own free will, and thou wilt not be able to compel him. Nor must thou leave among the bristles Turk Truith's razor, for I shall need it to finish what is begun by the tusk of Yskithyrwyn Penbaeth.'

'It will be easy,' said Kilhugh, itching to be gone.

'Young man,' interrupted Uspathadden, with a voice like a sea-cave in storm, rumbling within, roaring out of his mouth, hissing in the hair on his lips, 'young man, Turk Truith cannot be hunted without Dridwyn the hound, whelp of Greid the son of Eri.'

'Him I can easily obtain.'

'But if thou find him thou canst not hold him except in a leash made of Dillus Varvawc's beard, plucked out while he is alive, because it would be brittle if he were dead.'

'It will be easy for me to obtain it.'

'If thou dost, thou hast yet to perform the impossible. One huntsman in all the world was born to hunt with Dridwyn, and he alone. That is Mabon, the son of Modron. He was taken from his mother when three nights old, and it is not known where he now is, nor whether he is living or dead.'

'It will be easy for me to find him.'

'If thou find Mabon and Dridwyn and twist the leash out of Dillus Varvawc's beard and with their help thou bring Turk Truith to bay, thou canst not slay him. Only

the sword of Gwrnach the Giant will slay the boar, and Gwrnach will never give it of his own free will, either for a price or as a gift, nor canst thou compel him.'

'It will be easy for me to do this.' And Uspathadden grew more angry, and in a breath set him many other tasks. 'These also I shall perform,' said Kilhugh. 'Horses I shall have and chivalry and my lord and kinsman Arthur. I shall obtain all these things. I shall gain thy daughter and she shall wear the snowy wimple. Thou shalt trim thy thickets and shave thy beard and thou shalt die, Uspathadden Penkower.'

PART II

Then upon a golden morning of March, they set out, Arthur and his warriors and huntsmen, Kilhugh and the last son of Custennin. They rode on, with their eyes looking for Dillus Varvawc, and their minds dwelling on the nine bushels of flax to be unsown out of the earth, every seed of it. They crossed mountains pathless like the sea, and under forests that never knew the sun even in winter, and there were many days when Kilhugh's greyhounds had no heart to sport about him like sea-swallows. Some men went this way and some that; and one day upon a mountain, when the sun had set fire to the gorse and last year's bracken, Gwythyr the son of Greigawl heard a wailing and a grievous cry. He sprang towards the sound and traced it to an ant-heap right in the course of the torrent of fire that was rolling up the mountain. To save the inhabitants he drew his sword and mowed the gorse and bracken surrounding the nest. Thus the fire passed by at a distance on either side, and the ants thanked Gwythyr, saying:

'Receive from us the blessing of Heaven, and what no man can give we will give thee.' They sprinkled themselves over the red land opposite Uspathadden's castle and gathered up the nine bushels of seed all but one, and before night the lame ant came in carrying that one. Thus the ants provided a snowy bridal wimple for the head of Olwen.

The men travelled far in search of Dillus Varvawc to make a leash out of his beard for the hound Dridwyn. They were divided into many parties, and in one of these were Kay and Bedwyr. They were sitting one day on one of the cairns on the summit of Plinlimmon in a mighty wind, when they saw far off to the southward a huge column of smoke unbent by the wind. 'That is a robber's fire,' said Kay. As they hastened towards it, they saw at length a giant singeing the bristles of a wild boar before skinning it, and both knew that it was Dillus Varvawc. They hid themselves while Dillus flayed and cleaned and cooked the boar and while he ate gigantically. Then he fell asleep beside the embers. At his feet Kay dug a pit, and when it was very deep he struck the giant a fierce blow. Sleepily awaking, Dillus made efforts to rise, but fell instead into the pit. There he stuck fast like a frog in a snake's throat, and Bedwyr uprooted the hairs of his beard. When he was smooth they slew him altogether. They had now the leash for Dridwyn and hastened with it to Arthur at Gelli Wic in Cornwall.

'It is best now', said Arthur, 'to seek Dridwyn, whelp of Greid the son of Eri.' But though they set out to capture Dridwyn most men forgot the hound because of the quarrel in the north between Gwythyr and Gwynn the son of Nudd, who carried off Gwythyr's bride. Only Arthur could make peace between them.

The maiden was sent to her father's house, and it was ordained that Gwythyr and Gwynn should fight for her on every May-day until the day of doom, and that whoever should be the conqueror on that day should make her his bride. From the north men followed Arthur into Armorica and into Ireland and to the north again, and they were setting out upon the scent of Yskithyrwyn when a man came up to them leading two hounds in his right hand and one in the left. Now the single hound was Dridwyn and the leash was that which had been twisted out of Dillus Varvawc's beard. But the man could not or would not tell how he had captured Dridwyn. So Kilhugh thanked him and took Dridwyn and joined Arthur in pursuit of Yskithyrwyn. Arthur's own hound Cavall was the first to come up with the boar. King Kaw of North Britain drew out the tusk that was to shave Uspathadden, and afterwards slew the beast with his great axe.

They now thought more and more of the boar, Turk Truith, who had the comb and scissors and razor hidden between his ears that were to prune Uspathadden's head for Olwen's wedding. Arthur sent Menw, the man of charms and illusions, to see if these instruments were still in their place. As the boar had laid waste a third part of Ireland it was easy for Menw to find his traces. To enter his lair Menw took the form of a bird. He could see the scissors and comb, but when the bird Menw tried to snatch them away he was angrily shaken off with nothing more than one bristle of the boar. He brought back the news and the one bristle.

The hunt was still delayed because the hound Dridwyn was useless without Mabon the son of Modron as huntsman. Chief in the search for Mabon was Gwrhyr, who knew the languages of birds and beasts. He went first

to the Blackbird of Cilgwri to inquire. But the Blackbird answered out of his hawthorn leaves:

'When I first came here there was a smith's anvil in this place; and from that time no work has been done upon it save the pecking of my beak every evening; and what is left is not the size of a nut; yet I swear that during all that time I have never heard of Mabon. But go to the Stag of Redynvre. He is older than I.'

Gwrhyr tracked the Stag to the oak-trees of Redynvre, and asked if he knew Mabon. The Stag of Redynvre answered:

'When first I came hither, there was a plain all around me, without any trees save one oak sapling, which grew up to be an oak with a hundred branches. And that oak has since perished, so that now nothing remains of it but the withered stump; and from that day to this I have been here; yet have I never heard of the man for whom you inquire. Nevertheless, being an embassy from Arthur, I will be your guide to the place where there is an animal which was made before I was.' He directed them to the Owl of Cwm Cawlwyd, and Gwrhyr found her among the beeches of the steep-sided and solitary coombe. She was hooting to her echoes: in Cwm Cawlwyd there were four echoes, one after the other, and the last seemed to be on the other side of the moon.

'Owl of Cwm Cawlwyd, four owls in one,' said Gwrhyr, 'here is an embassy from Arthur; knowest thou aught of Mabon the son of Modron, who was taken after three nights from his mother?'

'If I knew I would tell you. When first I came hither, the wide valley you see was a wooded glen. And a race of men came and uprooted the trees. And there grew there a second wood; and this wood is the third. My wings, are they not withered stumps? Yet all this time,

even until to-day, I have never heard of the man for whom you inquire. Nevertheless, I will be the guide of Arthur's embassy until you come to the place where is the oldest animal in this world, and the one that has travelled most, the Eagle of Gwern Abwy.'

So she flew along above Gwrhyr, until they came to the precipice above a lake high upon a mountain, where lived the Eagle, and he asked for news of Mabon. The Eagle of Gwern Abwy answered:

'I have been here for a great space of time; when I first came hither there was a rock here, from the top of which I pecked at the stars every evening; and now it is not so much as a span high. From that day to this I have been here, and I have never heard of the man for whom you inquire, except once when I went in search of food as far as Llyn Llyw. And when I came there, I struck my talons into a salmon, thinking he would serve me as food for a long time. But he drew me into the deep, and I was scarcely able to escape from him. After that I went with my whole kindred to attack him, and to try to destroy him; but he sent messengers, and made peace with me; and he came and besought me to take fifty fish-spears out of his back. Unless he know something of him whom you seek, I cannot tell who may. However, I will guide you to the place where he is.'

Gwrhyr bent down and asked through the glassy water of Llyn Llyw the same question. The salmon rose up to the surface, and answered in silence:

'As much as I know I will tell thee. With every tide I go along the river upwards, until I come near to the walls of Gloucester, and there have I found such wrong as I never found elsewhere; and that ye may believe it, let one of you go thither upon each of my two shoulders.' So Kay and Gwrhyr went upon the two shoulders of the

salmon until they came unto the wall of the prison, and they heard a great wailing and lamenting from the dungeon. Said Gwrhyr, 'Who is it that laments in this house of stone?'

'Alas, I am Mabon the son of Modron, and no imprisonment was ever so grievous as mine, not even that of Greid the son of Eri.'

'Hast thou hope,' asked Gwrhyr, 'of being released by gold or silver, or only combat?'

'Only by combat,' said the voice of the dungeon.

Then they went thence, and returned to Arthur, and they told him where Mabon the son of Modron was imprisoned. And Arthur summoned the warriors of the Island, and they journeyed as far as Gloucester, to the place where Mabon was in prison. Kay and Bedwyr went upon the shoulders of the fish, whilst the warriors of Arthur attacked the castle. And Kay broke through the wall into the dungeon, and brought away the prisoner upon his back, whilst the fight was going on between the warriors. And Arthur returned home, and Mabon with him at liberty.

So they gave Mabon the leash made of Dillus Varvawc's beard, and he took charge of Dridwyn.

They had still to win the sword of the giant Gwrnach. When they came to Gwrnach's castle the knife was in the meat and the drink in the horn, and no man was admitted save a craftsman bringing his craft. Kay entered as a burnisher of swords. He was very welcome to Gwrnach, and a chair was placed for him opposite the Giant. Gwrnach's sword was brought for him to burnish it. When he had burnished half, he put it into the Giant's hand, asking him, 'Will this please thee?' And Gwrnach said, 'I would rather have the whole blade like this than all that is in my dominions. I marvel

that such a man as thou should be without a companion.'

'I have a companion, noble sir,' said Kay, 'though he is not skilled in this art.'

'Who may he be?'

'Let the porter go out. He will recognize the man whose lance will draw blood from the wind.'

The gate opened and Bedwyr entered, and while they were in the hall the last son of Custennin contrived an entrance for himself and all his companions, so that they scattered themselves through the castle, and slew all the Giant's men in secret.

The sword was now polished, and Kay gave it unto the hand of Gwrnach the Giant, to see if he were pleased with his work. And the Giant said, 'The work is good, I am content therewith.' Said Kay, 'It is thy scabbard that hath rusted thy sword, give it to me that I may take out the wooden sides of it and put in new ones.' And he took the scabbard from him, and the sword in the other hand. And he came and stood over against the Giant, as if he would have put the sword into the scabbard; and with it he struck at the Giant, and cut off his head at one blow. Then they despoiled the castle, and took from it what goods and jewels they would. And again on the same day, at the beginning of the year, they came to Arthur's Court, bearing with them the sword of Gwrnach the Giant.

Arthur now summoned the warriors of the three islands of Britain, of France, of Armorica, and of the Summer Country. With this host he entered Ireland, and men sought his protection against Turk Truith and his seven swine. First he sent Gwrhyr to the boar to ask him to come and speak to the King. But the boar refused and said:

'To-morrow I and my young swine will go into Arthur's own country and ravage it.'

Through the sea to Wales went the boar and the seven swine, followed by Arthur and his army and huntsmen and hounds in the King's galley, Prydwen. Turk Truith kept ahead of them, and killed many men and cattle in South Wales. The dead were found, but not their destroyers. Arthur sent out the swiftest hunters, and with them Dridwyn and his own hound Cavall. They hunted through St. David's and Milford, and over the Preselly Mountains, through Cardigan and back along the valleys of the river Loughor and the Aman, over the Black Mountains and the Beacons of Caermarthen, into the Tawy Valley, and over the Beacons of Brecknock. The boar turned upon them not once or twice and slew men, kings, and giants, and many hounds and horses. Often they lost him among the hills or on the cliffs of the coast. If any of the young swine were separated from Turk Truith and surrounded, he broke through to their help. But one by one the swine were killed. All the hounds were now loose; their barking and the shouts of Mabon and Arthur's huntsmen filled every valley. Only two of the swine came alive out of the valleys of the Loughor and the Aman, and soon these also were cut off and overpowered. At the pool of Ewin in Bettws on the slopes of the valley where Aman runs into Loughor, the boar turned upon Arthur himself and slew heroes as well as hounds and yet escaped. He was making eastwards away from these fatal valleys towards the Severn, and Arthur summoned all Cornwall and Devon to meet him at the estuary of the Severn.

'While I live,' said Arthur, 'the boar shall not enter Cornwall. Before that, I will oppose him in single combat myself.'

He sent men northward and southward and forced the boar to keep on towards the Severn. Mabon the huntsman came up with him at last in the water. Arthur and the champions of Britain stood upon the banks. Four men entered the river and caught Turk Truith by his feet, dowsing him as a shepherd dowses a sheep at the washing-places. Mabon spurred his horse into the water and seized the razor. On the other side a man took the scissors. But they could not hold the comb. Turk Truith had worked himself into the shallows and found his feet. Neither horse nor hound could overtake him or come in sight of him again until he reached Cornwall. There they wrested the comb from him, but the sword of Gwrnach was never stained in his blood. They could only drive him straight forward along the narrow valleys of Cornwall into the deep sea. Two of the hounds followed him into the sea. Nor was it ever known what became of Turk Truith or of the hounds.

In Cornwall Arthur rested and anointed himself after the hunting. The lesser adventures had still to be achieved by Kilhugh. He found the basket from which Uspathadden desired to eat at the marriage feast: if the whole world came together all could eat and be filled from this basket. He found the harp that was to be played at the feast: whatever melody a man desired it would play of itself. He took the blood of the jet-black sorceress which was necessary to moisten and spread out the hair of Uspathadden before he could be shaved.

With these things Kilhugh set out for the castle of Olwen and Uspathadden, and in his train rode the last son of Custennin and a company of good men who wished ill to the giant. King Kaw of North Britain, who had wrenched the tusk from Yskithyrwyn, was the

barber of Uspathadden. He was bound, and Kaw shaved him, beard, skin, and flesh, from ear to ear.

'Art thou shaved, man?' said Kilhugh.

'I am shaved,' answered the giant.

'Is thy daughter mine now?' asked Kilhugh.

'She is thine,' he said, 'but by my free will thou shouldst never have gained her, because when I lose her I lose my life.'

Then the last son of Custennin, unwilling to save Uspathadden to grace the marriage feast, dragged him to the castle keep, cut off his head, and stuck it upon a spike on high. They took possession of the castle and the giant's treasuries. Then Olwen came forth to Kilhugh. Her dress was of flame-coloured silk, and about her neck was a collar of ruddy gold, on which were precious emeralds and rubies. More yellow was her head than the flower of the broom, and her skin was whiter than the foam of the wave, and fairer were her hands and her fingers than the blossoms of the wood anemone amidst the spray of the meadow fountain. The eye of the trained hawk, the glance of the thrice-mewed falcon was not brighter than hers. Her bosom was more snowy than the breast of the white swan, her cheek was redder than the reddest roses. Whoso beheld her was filled with love. Four white trefoils sprang up wherever she trod; and therefore was she called Olwen. She became Kilhugh's bride in that castle upon the great plain, the fairest of the castles of all the world.

THE DREAM OF RHONABWY

IORWERTH, younger son of Meredith, refused to live at ease in the palace of his brother, King Madoc. He rode therefore into Logres to steal a kingdom. He and his men plundered, and none could withstand them. But one day he vanished. Madoc sent men on all sides to seek him. But in vain they sought, and the searchers were foiled again and again, and found themselves often in strange countries.

Now Rhonabwy and two others made one search-party and they could come upon no traces and hear no news of Iorwerth. One night of rain they arrived at an old dark house. Heavy smoke billowed out of the hall over the mire and the dead thistle as they entered. The floor was all mounds and puddles, foul and slippery as a cattlefold, but carpeted in places with boughs of holly. At one side was a range of dark chambers full of dust; at the other a hag, too old to be quite human, bent shivering to feed a bad fire with lapfuls of damp chaff. Rhonabwy and his companions could hardly endure the cold smoke that poured from the chaff. Nevertheless, they did not go out again into the tempest of rain and wind, but lay down to rest on a couch that had given its choicest portions to the cattle for provender. The other two fell asleep in spite of the knotty bed and the vermin, but only when he had lain down on a yellow calfskin before the fire could Rhonabwy sleep.

While Rhonabwy slept on this calfskin he dreamed. With his two companions he was traversing a plain in

North Wales towards the Ford of the Cross. As he rode he heard a noise such as he had never heard before, and turning round he saw a fierce youth of gigantic stature with curled yellow hair, riding on a chestnut horse. He was carrying a golden-hilted sword; his coat and scarf were of yellow satin sewn with green silk. The horse was caparisoned in the same colours; the green like that of the larch tree in April, the yellow like broom-flower. Fear overcame their admiration of this horse and horseman and the three began to fly, but in vain; for though the horse's breath drove them far away on its current it drew them back again right to his chest. They asked for mercy and the youth gave it, and they continued their journey in his company. Rhonabwy asked his name. He told them that he was Iddawc, who had stirred up strife between Arthur and his nephew Mordred, in mere youthful love of battles; and for that reason he was called Iddawc the Hammer of Britain. So Rhonabwy and his companions and Iddawc reached the ford together.

There Rhonabwy saw a city of tents and heard the cries of an innumerable army. On a flat islet in the Severn below the ford, Arthur the emperor was sitting between Bedwini the bishop and Gwarthegyd; and a tall youth with auburn hair and jet-black eyebrows stood before him, bearing a sheathed sword and wearing a coat and cap of jet-black satin. Riding a little into the shallows Iddawc and Rhonabwy and the other saluted those four upon the islet, and Arthur spoke:—

'Iddawc,' he asked, 'where didst thou find these little men?'

'Yonder, lord, upon the road,' replied Iddawc, and Arthur smiled.

'Why dost thou laugh?' said Iddawc.

'I do not laugh,' was the reply; 'but pity it is that men so little should be guardians of this island after the men who used to guard it.'

Then they stretched themselves out to rest on the grass under an alder, and Iddawc pointed out to Rhonabwy a stone in the ring of Arthur, telling him that it had the power to make him remember all that he would see this day.

As they rested, Rhonabwy saw troop after troop of armed men riding down and encamping about the ford, and Iddawc told him who were the men and horses all in crimson; who were those riding upon black-legged white horses; and those who were all white except for the jet-black borders of their white scarves, the black shoulders of the white horses, and the black points to their snowy banners; and those who were jet-black with white points and borders. All were haughty riders and one of the knights on the black-legged white horses spurred so furiously into the river that he drenched Arthur and his counsellors. The youth standing before Arthur turned, therefore, and struck the knight's horse over the nostrils with the sheathed sword. Instantly the man reined in his horse with a scattering of foam like a mill-wheel, and drew his sword half out of the scabbard, asking loudly:

'Didst thou strike for insult or for counsel?'

'Thou dost lack counsel,' said the youth, 'thus to drench the Emperor.'

'For counsel then will I take the blow,' answered the knight, and mounted the bank.

'That', said Iddawc, 'was Adaon the son of Taliesin, wisest and most eloquent youth in this island. The quick-tempered youth standing before Arthur is Elphin the son of Gwyddno.'

In a little while Rhonabwy saw a tall man rise up and speak to Arthur:

'By noon, lord, we are to be at the battle of Badon, fighting Osla. I at least will set out at once, either with or without thee.'

'Thou sayest well,' said Arthur, 'we will go together.'

'Rhonabwy,' said Iddawc, 'that man of daring and mighty speech was Caradoc, cousin and chief counsellor to Arthur, a man who may speak as he pleases to any man.'

Then the army crossed the Severn and the river swelled over its banks with the multitude of men and horses. Iddawc and Rhonabwy and his companions rode with them, not dismounting until they looked up at Badon Castle and heard the wind roar in ten thousand beeches on Badon hill; whether this were Bath, or Baydon in Wiltshire, few care and no man knows. When they had halted, one knight in white mail with rivets of blood-red set the host in tumult by his wondrous and fierce riding. 'That,' said Iddawc to Rhonabwy, 'is Kay.' The tumult was stilled only by a prince lifting up the sword of Arthur in its scabbard that was like two serpents. When he drew forth the blade it resembled the gushing of flames out of the mouths of the serpents, and it was hard to look, and hard not to look, upon this marvel. 'That man', said Iddawc, 'is Cador Earl of Cornwall, who arms the Emperor.'

When all was quiet a huge red man rode up on a huge red horse, rough and hideous like his master, and dismounted before Arthur. He brought a chair large enough to seat three armed warriors, and a satin carpet which had an apple of ruddy gold at each corner and made any one upon it invisible. In the chair Arthur

sat down, and Owen the son of Urien stood before him. 'Owen,' said Arthur, 'wilt thou play chess?'

'I will, lord,' replied Owen.

So the red man brought a chessboard of silver and golden chess-men, and Arthur began to play with Owen.

While they were deep in their game, Rhonabwy sitting among the beeches saw a white tent having a red canopy and on top a jet-black serpent painted, with red eyes and a red tongue in his open gorge. Out of the tent strode a yellow-haired page in coat and surcoat of yellow satin, greenish-yellow hose, and parti-coloured shoes fastened with golden clasps. His three-edged sword had a golden hilt and a gold-pointed black scabbard. He advanced to Owen and saluted him.

'Lord,' he said, 'is it by thy permission that the young pages and attendants of the Emperor torment thy Ravens? If not, beseech the Emperor to forbid them.'

'Lord,' said Owen, 'thou hearest the youth; if it seems good to thee, forbid thy pages and attendants.'

'Owen,' said Arthur, 'it is thy turn to play.'

So the youth returned to the tent, and Arthur and Owen finished the game of chess and began another. In the midst of this game Rhonabwy saw a goodly youth emerging from a yellow tent that had a bright red lion painted on top of it. He was ruddy, with auburn curled hair. His coat was of yellow satin and red silk embroidery, his hose were white, his buskins black and their clasps of gold. He carried a huge three-edged sword in a gold-tipped scabbard of red deer-hide. He also strode up to Owen and saluted him, saying:

'Lord, is it by thy permission that the young pages and attendants of the Emperor torment thy Ravens? If not, beseech the Emperor to forbid them.'

'Lord,' said Owen, 'thou hearest the youth; if it seem good to thee, forbid thy pages and attendants.'

'Owen,' said Arthur, 'it is thy turn to play.'

So the youth returned to the tent, and Arthur and Owen finished the game and began another. At the beginning of this game Rhonabwy saw a goodly youth striding out of a great tent speckled yellow and adorned with an eagle of gold, having a precious stone on its head. His hair was thick and yellow, his cheeks ruddy, and his eyes large and like a hawk's, and he wore a scarf of blue satin fastened on his right shoulder by a golden brooch. His shoes of parti-coloured leather were clasped with gold. In his right hand he bore a mighty lance, speckled yellow and displaying a banner. Anger was in his speed as he came up to the chess-players and saluted Owen.

'Lord,' he said, 'most of thy Ravens are dead. Those that live are so wounded they cannot raise their wings a fathom above the earth.'

'Lord,' said Owen, 'forbid thy men.'

'Play,' said Arthur, his eyes on the board.

Till he had spoken to the youth, Owen did not regard the chess-men.

'Go back,' he said, 'and in the thickest of the strife lift up the banner and let come what pleases Heaven.'

So the youth returned, and where the Ravens most suffered, Rhonabwy saw him lift up the banner on his yellow-speckled lance. Immediately the Ravens clapped their wings in the wind with a noise that drowned the roaring of the trees. They were shaking off their hurts and their weariness and even death. They rose up into the air boldly and very angrily, and swept down together in a frenzy on Arthur's men. They caught the men by their heads, by their eyes, by their ears, by their arms,

and soared with them on high. The air was full of the flapping and croaking of the triumphant Ravens and the groans of their victims struggling and wounded.

Arthur and Owen, still playing their game, marvelled at this conflict, and Rhonabwy noticed that Owen looked rather at Arthur than at the board. Then there galloped towards them a knight upon a dun horse, his right shoulder bright red, his legs yellow to the hoof. Both were in heavy foreign armour, and the caparison of the horse was bright red above and bright yellow below. Golden-hilted was the knight's sword and the scabbard light blue. His helmet was of gold set with precious stones, the crest a flame-coloured leopard with eyes of rubies. His blue-shafted lance was crimson red from haft to point with the blood of the Ravens. The face of the knight, even more than the leopard, astounded the heart of stoutest warriors.

Enraged but weary he saluted Arthur and said: 'Lord, the Ravens of Owen are slaying thy young men and attendants.'

'Forbid thy Ravens,' said Arthur, looking at Owen.

'Lord,' answered Owen, staring at the board, 'it is thy turn to play.'

So they played on and the knight returned to the tumult of men and Ravens, and the chess-players could not but hear the wails of men and the croaking of Ravens as they sailed with the men through the air and tore them and let them fall piecemeal to the earth. A second knight galloped towards them on a light-grey horse whose left foreleg was jet-black to the hoof. Both were in heavy blue armour. The knight's robe of honour was of yellow-diapered satin, blue-bordered; the horse was caparisoned in jet-black with yellow border. Three-edged and heavy was the knight's sword, and the

scabbard on his thigh was of red leather; his helmet was gold, set with sapphires of great virtue and crested with a lion of flame-colour, having a fiery red tongue and crimson eyes; the ashen lance headed with silver in his right hand was steeped in blood. He saluted the Emperor and said:

'Lord, dost thou not heed this slaughter? Thy pages and thy young men and the sons of the nobles of Britain are being killed, and who is to defend this island?'

'Owen,' said Arthur, 'forbid thy Ravens,' and it seemed to Rhonabwy that as the Emperor spoke there was no other sound in the world. But Owen answered only:

'Lord, play this game.'

Owen lost, and they began another game. As they were finishing, Rhonabwy heard a greater clamour of armed men and a yet greater croaking and flapping of Ravens flinging down armour and shreddings of men and horses. A third knight was riding up on a lofty-headed piebald horse, its left shoulder bright red and its right foreleg pure white. Horse and man were in armour of speckled yellow, and both wore robes of honour, black and white and bordered with purple. The knight's sword was three-edged and golden-hilted; his yellow helmet was set with crystals, and its crest was a griffin with a stone of many virtues in its head; and his spear was ashen, the shaft azure, the head overlaid with silver and stained with new blood. He came in anger.

'Lord,' he said to Arthur, 'the Ravens have slain the men of your household and the chief men of the island. Command Owen to forbid his Ravens.'

'Owen,' said Arthur, 'forbid them'; and Arthur's hands crushed the golden chess-men like clay under

Owen's eyes. Then Owen ordered the young man with the mighty lance speckled yellow to lower his banner. He lowered it and Rhonabwy saw peace and heard great silence. The Ravens gathered in ranks about the banner, and as their human fellows walked in and out amongst them not a beak or an eyelid stirred, and they looked wiser than any man that Rhonabwy had ever seen.

Rhonabwy now saw twenty-four knights come up to Arthur from Osla to crave a truce. The Emperor rose up and assembled his counsellors, Rhun the son of Maelgwn Gwynedd, Bedwini the bishop, Mark, Caradoc, Gwalchmai, Mabon, Peredur, Trystan, Morien, Cador, Adaon the son of Taliesin, and Cadyriaith, and men of Norway and Denmark and men of Greece and many others.

'Who is the tall auburn knight?' asked Rhonabwy.

'He,' said Iddawc, 'is Rhun son of Maelgwn Gwynedd.'

'And why,' again asked Rhonabwy, 'why is such a stripling as Cadyriaith admitted to this council?'

'Because,' answered Iddawc, 'there is no man throughout Britain more skilled in counsel.'

Then the bards came and recited verses before Arthur, but no man save Cadyriaith understood more of them than that they were in praise of the Emperor.

Next arrived twenty-four wayworn men leading each an ass, bearing gold and silver as tribute to Arthur from the Islands of Greece, and Cadyriaith rose and spoke, proposing that the asses and the gold and silver should be given to the bards as a reward for their verses, and that the truce should be granted to Osla.

'Rhonabwy,' said Iddawc, 'would it not be wrong to exclude so liberal a youth as Cadyriaith from the councils of his Lord?'

As Cadyriaith proposed, so it was agreed, and Kay rose up and spoke to the host:—

'Let whosoever will follow Arthur be with him to-night in Cornwall, and whosoever will not is Arthur's enemy.' Not a man, not a raven, remained still or silent at these words, and in the clamour of that host beginning to surge towards Cornwall, Rhonabwy awoke upon the yellow calfskin. His sleep was three nights and three days long when he dreamed this dream.

THE DREAM OF MAXEN

ONE day Maxen the Roman Emperor, handsomest of men and wisest of emperors, held a council of kings and said to them: 'To-morrow I will hunt.' With two and thirty crowned kings who were his vassals he hunted along the river until mid-day. Then he slept in the great heat and men stood round him and kept off the sun with their shields. In his sleep he had a dream.

Riding along the valley of the river, he came to the highest mountain in the world, and from the summit he saw mighty rivers descending to the sea. Towards the mouths of the rivers he travelled over the fairest of plains. At length his road followed one of these rivers, the broadest he had ever seen, and at its mouth he came to a great city and a castle with many towers of different coloured stone. A fleet, the largest ever seen, was anchored in the river. To the largest and fairest of the ships led a bridge of whalebone, and he went over it into the ship. A sail of the ship was hoisted and he sailed over sea and ocean to the shore of the fairest island of the whole world. He landed and traversed the island to the furthest shore. He saw high mountains and deep valleys and terrible precipices, such as he had never seen before. From the top of one mountain he saw another island and a river flowing from the mountain into the sea. At the mouth of this river was a castle, the fairest that man ever saw, and the gate was open and he went in.

The hall was beautiful, having a roof of gold and walls of glittering gems, and doors also of gold. The tables were silver, the seats of gold. At one of the tables two

youths with auburn hair were playing at chess, and they had a silver board and golden pieces. Their garments were of jet-black satin; their buskins of new Cordovan leather buckled with gold; and their hair was bound with chaplets of ruddy gold and jewels.

Beside one of the pillars of the hall Maxen saw a hoary-headed and mighty-looking man in a chair of ivory with two eagles of ruddy gold upon it. Gold bracelets were upon his arms, and many rings on his hands, and a collar of gold about his neck, and on his head a golden diadem. He had before him a golden chess-board and a rod of gold, and a steel file in his hand; and he was carving chess-men.

Facing the old man sat a maiden in a chair of ruddy gold. It was not more easy to gaze upon her than upon the sun at its brightest, she was so beautiful. She wore a vest of white silk clasped with red gold at her breast, a surcoat of gold tissue and a golden girdle; and a circlet of red gold, rubies and pearls upon her head.

The maiden rose from her chair and Maxen threw his arms about her neck and kissed her, but even while his arms were round her and his cheek against her cheek, the clashing of shields and the neighing of horses awoke the Emperor.

His attendants said to him: 'Lord, is it not past the time for thee to eat?' But he had no life or spirit left in him for love of that maiden. He mounted his horse, the saddest man that ever a man saw, and rode to Rome.

For a week it was vain to offer the Emperor meat or drink. He would hear no songs or tales; he would do nothing but sleep and strive by all possible means to sleep again, because in his dreams he could see that maiden. One day a page came into his room and told him that the people were discontented and speaking ill

of him because he took no notice of anything that was said or done. 'Young man,' said Maxen, 'bring to me the wise men of Rome and I will tell them why I am sorrowful.'

The wise men sat round, and Maxen said:

'Wise men of Rome, I have had a dream. In the dream I saw a maiden, and for thinking of her I have no life or spirit left in me, and I can think of nothing but her.'

'Lord,' answered the wise men, 'since thou judgest us worthy to advise thee, this is our advice: that thou shalt send messengers into the three parts of the world to seek for the maiden of the dream. As thou knowest not what day or night may bring good news of her, the hope will give thee life.'

Messengers travelled for a year, wandering over the earth, seeking news of the island, the castle, and the maiden of Maxen's dream. But at the end of the year, though they had seen many islands, many castles, many maidens, they had discovered nothing about the dream. The Emperor was now more sorrowful than ever; he thought that he should never see the maiden again, and all his hours of sleep were busy with visions as if he had been awake, and his waking hours were all one dream.

Then the King of the Romans advised the Emperor to go forth to hunt as he had done on the day of the dream, and he did so and came to the bank of the river where he had slept. 'This,' said he, 'is where I was lying when I had the dream, and from here I seemed to go westward.'

Thirteen messengers, who had been taught about his dream, set out in search towards the west. They came to the highest mountain in the world, and from the summit they saw mighty rivers descending to the sea. They travelled over the fairest of plains, and came to a great city at the mouth of one of the rivers of the

plain. They knew that this was the land of Maxen's dream, and they saw the fleet anchored in the river-mouth under the many-coloured high towers of the castle. As the Emperor had done, they went on board the fairest of the ships and sailed over sea and ocean till they came to an island. This island was Britain. They traversed it until they came to Snowdon. 'This,' they said, 'is the land of high mountains, deep valleys and terrible precipices that the Emperor saw.' From one of the crests they saw the island of Anglesey, and they knew that that was the other island of Maxen's dream. They saw also Aber Sain and a castle at the river's mouth. The gate was open and they went in. They knew the hall. The two youths with auburn hair were playing chess; the mighty old man was carving chess-men in the chair with the eagles of gold; the maiden was sitting opposite. The messengers fell down upon their knees before her, saying, 'Empress of Rome, all hail!'

'You seem honourable men, wearing the badge of envoys,' said the maiden, 'why then do ye mock me in this manner?'

'We mock thee not, lady. The Emperor of Rome has seen thee in his sleep, and since then he has no life or spirit left in him because of thee. Wilt thou come with us to Rome to be made empress, or wouldest thou rather that the Emperor should come hither to wed thee?'

'Lords,' she answered, 'I cannot deny what ye have said, neither can I believe it. If the Emperor love me let him come hither.'

The messengers hastened day and night back to Rome, and saluted the Emperor, saying: 'We have seen her; Helen is her name; and willingly shall we guide thee to her castle.'

Immediately the Emperor set forth with his army, and as he galloped over the mountains or walked up and down the ship he knew what was the difference between a dream and what is not a dream. He recognized the island far off. He landed, and galloped forward until he saw again the castle at the river's mouth. The gate was open and he entered. There sat Helen, the maiden whom he had seen in his sleep, and he bowed before her, saying, 'Empress of Rome, all hail!' She became his bride, and he gave her as a gift the island of Britain and the three lesser islands, and three castles to be built where she commanded. The highest she had made at Arvon, and the others at Caerlleon and Caermarthen. From one castle to another she made roads over the mountains right across Wales, and these are called to this day the roads of Helen; nor would the men of Britain have made these great roads except for her. To the castle at Arvon men brought Roman earth, so that the Emperor might sleep and sit and walk on native soil. He stayed there seven years, and the men of Rome were tired of waiting and made a new emperor. This man wrote a letter to Maxen containing only these words: 'If thou comest, and if thou ever comest to Rome.' And Maxen sent a letter back containing these words: 'If I come to Rome, and if I come.' Following the letter he led an army to the gates of Rome, and the brothers of Helen, the young men with auburn hair, took possession of the city for Maxen. There he ruled with Helen. As to the brothers they set forth again with a host. They conquered lands and castles and cities, and when their heads were grey they returned to Britain, taking with them some of the beautiful women of the conquered, whose tongues they had cut out lest they should spoil the speech of Britain.

NOTE ON SOURCES

THESE tales are founded upon ancient ones, the work of Welshmen and Irishmen when Wales and Ireland were entirely independent of England. The Welsh tales come from a book now known as the *Mabinogion*. They were written down at the end of the Middle Ages, and translated from Welsh into English by Lady Guest in the nineteenth century. The original Welsh manuscript (called 'The Red Book of Hergest', because it was once at Hergest in Radnor) belongs to the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, but the stories had been told over and over again, and probably written down many times, before they were copied into 'The Red Book'. They were being told in the years between the Norman conquest of England and Edward I's conquest of Wales. But the subjects of them were much earlier. Even those who told the tales would, perhaps, have been unable to say when a man as huge as Bran was ruling at Harlech, nor did they consider the matter any more than children to-day consider the tale of 'Jack the Giant-killer' in its relation to scientific fact. But in 'Kilhugh and Olwen' and 'The Dream of Rhonabwy' King Arthur appears. The men who told these two stories were probably thinking of a glorious heroic age, when Arthur was a supreme king, resisting the Roman and Saxon invader. They gave a strange reality to some of the wonders by connecting them with actual places in Wales, so that a man to-day could walk in the steps of Kilhugh and Rhonabwy. Even 'The Dream of Maxen', which is about a Roman emperor, comes to its height and to its end in Wales, and in places which are still to be seen. Very little was known to the mediaeval writers about the age of the Saxon invaders and the seventh-century King Arthur, except that it was one of greater men than any that were living; and therefore they described their heroes as if they were Welsh and Norman warriors in dress and manners, but of greater stature and prowess. They were certain that Arthur had once been king in Britain, and they were ready to come to blows with men who denied it. In one story, 'The Dream of Rhonabwy,' they put along with the King two young princes, Madoc and Iorwerth, who actually belonged to the twelfth century.

The name 'Mabinogion' means something like 'twice-told tales': it means precisely the old tales on which a young writer practised.

So in Ireland, the tale of Deirdre was one which the poets had to know, and the Irish told their tales over and over again, age after age, adding to them and taking away, as the Welsh did. They were still more clear about their heroes, though the stories as we have them are very little earlier than the Welsh, and were therefore written down long after the events were supposed to have taken place. Consequently, the kind of life described, when it is not in our eyes impossible, is the life of the storyteller's own age in Christian Ireland. As in 'Kilhugh', so in one of the Irish tales, 'There is scarcely a hill, valley, river, rock, mound, or cave in the line of country from Emania in the present county of Armagh to Lusk in that of Dublin, of which the ancient and often varying names and history are not to be found' in it. So also the stories of Cohoolin are said to be invaluable for their details of mediaeval Irish life. Cohoolin and the King Conachoor were supposed to have lived at about the time of Christ: one story relates that Conachoor died of rage on hearing of the death of Christ. After that heroic age followed the Ossianic. The date of Finn's death is given in an old Irish book, called *The Annals of the Four Masters*, as A.D. 283. The Irish have long believed in the followers of Finn as an order of Knighthood under the Kings of Ireland, which came to an end with the battle of Gabhra in A.D. 283, in the reign of Cairbre, the son of King Cormac: a modern scholar was certain that Finn was as real as Julius Caesar. Probably Finn did exist, or some one of the same name; he is as real as Agamemnon; and as for Arthur, is it not told that he did not die, but passed away? The tales of this Ossianic age were supposed to have been the work of Ossian himself, one of the Fenians, and he was connected with historic times by his meeting with St. Patrick, who belonged to the fourth and fifth centuries. We cannot tell how near to that age lived the first tellers of the tales. Many early manuscripts in Ireland were destroyed by the Norse invaders, and not only did the Norsemen probably destroy old versions of the tales, but they unconsciously changed the tales by figuring in them afterwards. The Norsemen were the storytellers' 'Lochlanners', and their presence shows that the stories took their present form after the invasions. But they were not made then. These Irish and Welsh tales were handed down from generation to generation, like the games of children. They were only in part consciously 'made up'. 'Out of nothing is nothing made' is true of airiest fiction. It is one of the charms under the surface of these stories that we can feel, even if we can never trace, a pedigree of dimmest antiquity

behind them. Matthew Arnold speaks of the mediaeval story-teller in the *Mabinogion* pillaging 'an antiquity of which he does not fully possess the secret'. This is clear in 'The Dream of Rhonabwy', when the storyteller says that 'no one knows the dream without a book, neither bard, nor gifted seer; because of the various colours that were upon the horses, and the many wondrous colours of the arms and of the panoply, and of the precious scarfs, and of the virtue-bearing stones'. It is clearer in the tale of Bran and in the Irish tales; the narrator is speaking of gods or demi-gods where he thinks he is speaking of men. He did not 'make up' these tales. Very little in any of them is 'made up', though they must have been modified to accord with changing taste and custom and belief and were told only for delight. These marvellous men of old time, as the mediaeval storyteller thought them, are now said to be the gods of much earlier pagan generations, changed by the wear and growth of centuries who knew them not as gods. The unravelling of these changes in order to trace the origin of the stories, or at least as early as possible a form of them, is a highly specialized scientific sport. The result of it is that Conachoor turns out to be 'doubtless not a man', but a Celtic Zeus; and his sister Dectora, the mother of Cohoolin, is in one place actually called a goddess. Cohoolin himself is discovered to be a 'sun-hero'; the blacksmith's dog is a sort of a Cerberus; and the gaebolg is not the impossible invention of an author's cruel ingenuity, but 'mythologically speaking, the direction of it from the water upwards would seem to indicate as its interpretation the appearance of the sun as seen from the Plain of Muirthemne (Moorhevna), when rising out of the sea to pierce with his rays the clouds above'. I am quoting from Professor Rhys' Hibbert Lectures. So Finn, again, is 'the counterpart of the Welsh god Gwyn, king of the fairies and the dead', and both of them are shown to have learnt wisdom by sucking their thumbs. The enormous Bran is a 'Celtic Janus'.

Many of these tales have been re-written by poets and others in our own time. I have kept them as nearly as possible in their mediaeval form.

Printed in England at the Oxford University Press

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